On the Problem of Common Ground:

Van Til, Dooyeweerd and Thomas Kuhn

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Introduction

In the postmodern era, it is generally acknowledged that our knowledge is moulded within our limitations, that is, our a priori prejudices and our situatedness in a context. The three figures that I will deal with in this thesis are in a sense precursors of or in a certain manner related to this postmodern spirit, though these three figures (Van Til, Dooyeweerd, and Kuhn) are related to the spirit in a quite different way.\(^1\)

From these figures’ basic contentions, I pick up their common issue, that is, the ‘common ground’ problem; “Is there common ground between differing prejudicial or religious groups which makes communication and agreement possible?”

At first glance, it seems so natural to assume that we have common ground and common understanding in our communication. That is why we can understand each other and communicate appropriately without having much of a problem working out our everyday life. However, once it has been claimed that there is necessarily a religious and prejudicial element in our communication which is beyond theoretical proof, possibly causing communication breakdown and disagreement in a certain part of our communication, then the question of whether common ground is possible at all and, if possible, what that common ground is, becomes an issue.

While both Van Til and Dooyeweerd entirely agree that our understanding and interpretation of the world are fundamentally determined by supra-theoretical religious presuppositions, they differ on the issue of whether there is common ground or not. Van

\(^1\) Actually, Van Til may not belong to this group, because we know that he maintains universal objective truth which is revealed only to believers. However, in the sense that he emphasizes presuppositions within
Til is generally known to contend that there is an absolute antithesis and thus total communication breakdown between believers and unbelievers and thus no point of contact between them. By contrast, Dooyeweerd contends that there is a certain territory of common ground which makes it possible to communicate and have co-operation between the believer and the unbeliever.

This issue between Van Til and Dooyeweerd has very significant implications regarding our attitude toward working with the non-Christian, regarding our evaluation of the Reformed doctrine of Common Grace and regarding Christian apologetics.

While the Van Til and Dooyeweerd debate is mainly concerned with issues within Christianity, Thomas Kuhn, a secular scientist, contends for the existence of a prejudicial element and its fundamental influence even in the most rigorous scientific discourse. Thus, he claims that there can be a communication breakdown in a certain territory of our communication between differing theoretical groups. This so-called “incommensurability” thesis also evokes many serious objections and is often referred to as “relativism” and “irrationalism.”

Most opponents read Kuhn's incommensurability thesis as “total” communication breakdown, that is to say, there is no common ground or no common understanding to make possible communication between different theoretical groups, and this is definitely contrary to our common experience of discussion. Therefore, they object to Kuhn’s

theistic dimension of our experience and thus gives a certain hint of the postmodern mind, I try to relate him to this group.

2 Cf. Cornelius Van Til, Christianity in Conflict, unpublished class syllabus, Ch. IX, 33. He says, “The believer need, therefore, never to worry about the question of the point of contact with the unbeliever. The only thing that he needs to avoid to like death is to seek for a point of contact with the unbelievers.” But whether or not this statement can represent Van Til’s entire view on the antithesis doctrine is still in doubt, according to John Frame. Cf. Frame, John, “Van Til on Antithesis,” WTS, 57, (1995), 81-102.
theory as absurd and bizarre. By contrast, Kuhn explains that he has always contended that there is sufficient common ground (overlap) between differing theoretical groups and that rational debate is possible between differing paradigm groups. He claims that the communication breakdown lies in a certain “part” of our communication and thus it is a “partial,” and therefore not a “total” break.

With this observation, I will make a contrast, comparing the debate between Kuhn and his opponents with that between Van Til and Dooyeweerd. Kuhn’s critics’ contention about Kuhn would be similar to Van Til's defense of the radical antithesis doctrine, while Kuhn's case would be similar to Dooyeweerd's contention for the existence of common territory.

In this thesis, putting these figures’ positions together, I will firstly deal with Van Til and Dooyeweerd's debate on common ground. In so doing, I will show that Dooyeweerd’s critics lay claim that in early Dooyeweerd’s position, there is a tension between the idea of the existence of religious presuppositions influencing every part of theoretical thought and, at the same time, the existence of a “universal” structure of thought being the same for all. However, I will demonstrate that Dooyeweerd’s contention is more complicated than this simplified criticism and seeming contradiction and that he always leaves us room for a more adequate interpretation, if one sees his work in the context of his whole project.

Regarding Van Til's position, I will describe how he insists on an absolute (or extreme) antithesis doctrine. In his doctrine, there is no common ground and no point of contact between the believer and the unbeliever. Though Van Til's absolute antithesis doctrine appears more consistent than that of Dooyeweerd in its radicalness, I will show
that Van Til’s absolute antithesis doctrine is almost untenable, by demonstrating the
problems this position necessarily brings about in terms of the traditional Common Grace
doctrine and his overall antithesis doctrine.

I will conclude this part by claiming against Van Til’s position that there should
exist common ground between the believer and non-believer, and that according to
Dooyeweerd’s later position, the common ground consists in ‘the same reality,’ ‘the same
states of affairs,’ and human being’s rational capacity, all of which are derived from our
“metaphysical” (or ontological) commonness.

In the second part, I will deal with Kuhn’s incommensurability thesis. While, in
the first part, the common ground issue is mainly treated within Christianity, that is,
within a religious context, in this second part, Kuhn’s thesis deals with the prejudicial
elements in all dimensions of our daily experience and even in the most rigorous
scientific research process.

In this discussion, I will show that while the neo-positivists mistakenly understand
that according to incommensurability thesis, Kuhn makes claim that there is “total”
communication breakdown between different schools, Kuhn’s true thesis is that the
communication breakdown is not ‘total’ but ‘partial,’ and thus there is sufficient common
ground to make communication possible.

And here I will also conclude that this common ground is eventually derived from
‘the same reality’ and ‘the same states of affairs’ and ‘our logical capacity’ based on our
metaphysical commonness, though Kuhn does not explicitly mention them.

The overall implication of this thesis would be that in general, in our (evaluative)
conversation, we cannot arrive at consensus only by rational, theoretical argument,
because of our a priori prejudices and religious convictions. But the fact is that we can still discuss things in a rational way, because of our (metaphysical) commonness. In particular, regarding my concern with Christian apologetics, the Christian can talk to the non-Christian even about the issue of the existence of God in a genuine way, due to the common ground (a position with which Van Til does not agree). But Christians and non-Christians cannot talk toward a consensus and persuade each other into Christianity, because the spiritual sphere or religious conviction moves beyond rational proof. Thus, our rational theoretical proof or, the task of apologetics, should be restricted to the invitation for non-Christians to consider our Christian faith and to provide a tool for the Holy Spirit to work with, and to defend our faith against rational attacks.
I. Van Til and Dooyeweerd on the Problem of Common Ground

The first discussion by Van Til on the problem of common ground appeared in his article, “Bavinck the Theologian.” And Van Til's second discussion, on Dooyeweerd's philosophy, appeared in his class syllabus Christianity in Conflict which contains the subsection “Modern Dimensionalism,” where Van Til concentrates on two aspects of Dooyeweerd's dimensionalism: “The Antithesis” and “Communication.” And the dialogue between Dooyeweerd and Van Til ends with the book, Jerusalem and Athens, which is the volume of critical discussions of the theology and apologetics of Cornelius Van Til.

On the one hand, as radical Reformed thinker, Van Til agrees with Dooyeweerd in denying the pretended autonomy of human reason. However, on the other hand, they are in conflict on a relatively minor point, that is, the problem of “common ground” or “the point of contact.” On this issue, Van Til criticizes Dooyeweerd for still having ‘scholastic tendencies’ in his thought. In other words, Van Til thinks, Dooyeweerd still mixes “the Christian principle with the principle of Greek thinking” in that Dooyeweerd still asserts that there is common ground between Christian and non-Christian thinking and that therefore both can start from the same starting point. By contrast, Van Til's contention is

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5 Cornelius Van Til, Christianity in Conflict, 30.
6 Cornelius Van Til, Jerusalem and Athens, 91.
that there is a radical antithesis and so there is no common ground in theoretical thought between the Christian and the non-Christian.⁷

In this section, I will try to compare Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s contentions on the common ground issue. For this purpose, I will firstly deal with the conversation between Van Til and Dooyeweerd which appears in Van Til’s unpublished syllabus, *Christianity in Conflict* and in the book, *Jerusalem and Athens*. And in so doing, I will show that while Dooyeweerd makes claims for a certain commonness, Van Til contends for the “absolute” antithesis. And, in the second part, I will also show the serious problems Van Til’s radical antithesis doctrine necessarily entails.

**A. Van Til’s Criticism of Dooyeweerd in *Christianity in Conflict***

In the section on “the antithesis” of his class syllabus, *Christianity in Conflict*, Van Til does not raise any problem with Dooyeweerd but simply analyses and affirms Dooyeweerd’s basic thesis that all theoretical thought is influenced by supra-theoretical, religious motives and that these religious motives are, if traced all the way down, “divided by an irrevocable religious antithesis” between Christian and non-Christian.⁸ And Van Til concludes: “That Dooyeweerd regards the antithesis between his own epistemology and that of the immanence standpoint is now apparent.”⁹

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⁷ Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity in Conflict*, unpublished class syllabus, Ch. IX, 33.
⁸ *Christianity in Conflict*, 11.
⁹ Ibid., 18. *It is necessary to note here that this and the following quotations below from Van Til show his misinterpretation of Dooyeweerd’s antithesis, since Dooyeweerd’s antithesis is not between persons, that is, not between Christians and non-Christians but between Christ and sin. And because all human beings,
In the next subsection on “Communication”, however, Van Til asks the question: “If the antithesis [exists] between those who interpret life in terms of the autonomous man and those who interpret it in terms of the Christ who has redeemed them, then how is there to be fruitful communication between them?”

Van Til’s answer is apparently negative. His main contention is that there exists objective truth, but it can be discovered only by a regenerated person who follows the Scriptural interpretation and, by contrast, an unbeliever’s interpretation is simply false, because there is no way for the unbelievers to find truth except by the eye-opening experience through the work of the Holy Spirit. So there cannot be any compromising fact or point of contact between believers in Christ and unbelievers who are spiritually blind. In the beginning of the section, he even says that believers don’t need to try to find the point of contact following the unbeliever’s principle of interpretation, because, according to Van Til’s favorite illustration, the unbelievers are like the prodigal son whose wealth (i.e., their interpretational principle) is not his own (i.e., not autonomous) but provided by his father.

The believer need, therefore, never to worry about the question of the point of contact with the unbeliever. The only thing that he needs to avoid like death is to seek for a point of contact with the unbeliever in terms of the basic interpretative principle of the unbeliever. So long as he avoids doing this, then he needs not be concerned even with respect to the most violent ridicule that is poured upon his position. In fact, he must expect ridicule.

Christians or non-Christians, are sinners, the antithesis always exists in Christian thought, too. Henk Hart points out that “For Dooyeweerd the antithesis runs through all creation and is also in the work of Christians. It is not between Christian and non-Christian epistemology, but runs through both. The antithesis [for Dooyeweerd] is between standpoints - not products produced by them.” From his note on an early draft of this thesis.

10 Ibid., Ch. IX, 32.
11 Ibid., Ch. IX, 34.
12 Ibid., Ch IX, 33 (Italics mine).
In other words, Van Til is professing an absolute antithesis between believers and unbelievers and thus no possibility of, or even no need of expecting, meaningful communication.

By contrast, according to Van Til's analysis in the section “Communication” in his class syllabus, Dooyeweerd seems to negotiate and weaken his position about the antithesis when engaging in dialogue with a neo-Thomistic philosopher, Prof. J. Robbers, who, for Van Til, still “combines the principle of Christianity with that of the natural man.”13 Dooyeweerd says that Robbers and himself can start from the same starting point, if he truly follows the method of transcendental criticism. Van Til interprets Dooyeweerd,

The conclusion of the matter, argues Dooyeweerd, is that a genuine philosophical contact is possible on the basis of transcendental criticism. After all, is it not true that every philosophy must give itself a theoretical account of the same reality, being bound to the same structure of thought? Have they not all developed in one historically founded communion of thought? And must they not all submit to undeniable states of affairs in reality?14

In this passage, Van Til understands that the ground on which Dooyeweerd makes his claim for the possibility of communication is that all human beings, believers or unbelievers, have “the same reality” and “the same structure of thought” and the same “undeniable state of affairs.” However, Van Til considers this as “softening” the antithesis doctrine on the part of Dooyeweerd.

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., Ch. IX, 36. (italics mine).
It has been said that in his praiseworthy desire to engage in dialogue with those who do not share his biblical approach Dooyeweerd has softened the antithesis between his own position and theirs.\textsuperscript{15}

By the way, for Van Til, there is no such thing as “state of affairs” that is the same both to believer and non-believer. If there be such a thing as an undeniable state of affairs, it is only to be known by Christians who follow the Scriptural principle of interpretation. Van Til says, “Thus the objective state of affairs is what the Bible teaches that it is. That is to say, all the facts of the world are created. All of them through the sin of man are under the curse...”\textsuperscript{16}

With this view of an absolute antithesis, Van Til criticizes Dooyeweerd again.

Dooyeweerd involves himself in open inconsistency at this point. He argues first that it is in the light of the Scripture that the states of affairs have been discovered to be what they are. Surely then it is only he who looks through the glasses of Scripture who can see the states of affairs for what they are .... [However], Dooyeweerd further asserts that he does not at all intend to identify the actual state of affairs with his philosophical [biblical] view of reality.\textsuperscript{17}

Consequently, Van Til keeps on insisting on the radical antithesis between believers’ and non-believers’ thinking and, by contrast, according to Van Til's analysis, Dooyeweerd is not consistent because he holds, on the one hand, to the antithesis between the believer and unbeliever and on the other, he allows the common area of the states of affairs and the structure of theoretical thought.

Now I will turn to the book, \textit{Jerusalem and Athens}, where Dooyeweerd responds to this criticism and Van Til again responds and defends his criticism of Dooyeweerd.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. (italics mine).
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 41-42.
B. Dooyeweerd's Criticism of Van Til in Jerusalem and Athens

While responding to and correcting Van Til's misunderstanding of his use of the term "religious", Dooyeweerd summarizes and discusses Van Til's criticism of himself on three points. According to Van Til’s criticism, they are: 1) Dooyeweerd rejects a “transcendent” method, insisting on a “transcendental” method to save common ground; 2) Dooyeweerd claims that the “the states of affairs have an objectivity apart from the biblical presuppositions”; and 3) in particular, Dooyeweerd holds “that irrationalism and subjectivism can be answered without reference to biblical content.”

On these criticisms, first of all, Dooyeweerd dismisses Van Til's third point and does not discuss it further because he believes that Van Til fundamentally misunderstood him, because he even rejects “the distinction between rationalism and irrationalism, and subjectivism and objectivism.”

Secondly, regarding the first criticism, that is, that Dooyeweerd is pursuing ‘a universal territory’ by advocating a ‘transcendental’ method, Dooyeweerd responds that Van Til, rather, employs a “transcendent” method and ends up with a “dogmatic” approach.

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19 Ibid. On this point, Dooyeweerd writes only 3 lines. So I do not get exactly what is the issue, but Dooyeweerd seems to me to believe that Van Til’s criticism on this third point is fundamentally wrong about his position. But I cannot discuss this point further because Dooyeweerd does not further discuss this. And it is hard for me to find the connection of this point with my present thesis.
By Van Til's transcendent method, Dooyeweerd understands Van Til's way of criticizing "philosophical theories from a theological or from a different philosophical viewpoint" without examining the more fundamental theoretical structure.²⁰ Van Til, therefore, ends in a dogmatic conclusion. Dooyeweerd demonstrates the danger of transcendent criticism by discussing the article of Reformed confession concerning human nature. In the confession, the article in question was rejected just because it did not agree with the traditional scholastic view, rather than because it was critically examined by fundamental theoretical analysis.²¹ In other words, by using a transcendent method, since it depends more on tradition, i.e., uncritically accepted prejudice, Dooyeweerd claims, this method is supposed to be exposed to the danger of dogmatic conclusion.

Thus, Dooyeweerd argues that since starting from the outset with his dogmatic (transcendent) presupposition, Van Til's critique "cuts off the dialogue before it could start" and the method "in other words, is valueless to science and philosophy...... One can then just as well proceed to exercise criticism of science from the standpoint of art or of politics."²² That is, if one uses a transcendent method, one could as well try to criticize science and philosophy from the viewpoint of art. Such a critique definitely ends in a dogmatic conclusion and thus Dooyeweerd claims that we need to start from a more fundamental theoretical foundation.

With this critical analysis, Dooyeweerd proposes the method of a 'transcendental' critique. By the "transcendental critique" which he employs, Dooyeweerd means "a

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²⁰ Ibid., 75.
²¹ Ibid.
²² Ibid., 90.
critical inquiry (respecting no single so-called theoretical axiom) into the universally valid conditions which alone make theoretical thought possible, and which are required by the immanent structure of this thought itself.”23 And, Dooyeweerd argues, this “sharpening of the method of transcendental thought” is accomplished by dropping all merely transcendent or “dogmatic” criticism and turning to an exclusive analysis of “the theoretical attitude of thought as such.”24

However, Van Til criticizes these statements by observing that by this transcendental method, Dooyeweerd tacitly admits that the transcendental critique pursues a certain neutral territory which is beyond supra-theoretical religious presuppositions and this is not consistent with his basic antithetical point of view. Supporting his claim, he points out other places in Dooyeweerd’s early writings which he interprets to mean that Dooyeweerd lays claim to universal states of affairs.

At the end of Vol. I. of his New Critique Dooyeweerd concludes that “The transcendental critique of theoretical thought, which we have presented in this volume, is, to be sure, the ultimate theoretical foundation of philosophy (my italics).” (I. p. 544)

This statement is understood to mean by Van Til that Dooyeweerd’s whole endeavor in his New Critique with the transcendental method is seeking the final account of theoretical thought, which will be an undeniable state of affairs and will thus be common to all regardless of one’s religious a priori.

24 Ibid.
Furthermore, Van Til points out the following statements in Dooyeweerd’s response to himself, believing these are evidence for Dooyeweerd’s claiming a neutral territory for theoretical thought.

This is why this transcendental critique is obliged to begin with an inquiry into the inner nature and structure of the theoretical attitude of thought and experience as such and not with a confession of faith. In this first phase of the critical investigation such a confession would be out of place.  

The confrontation of the biblical and the non-biblical ground-motives of theoretical thought belongs to the third and last phase of the transcendental critique.

These remarks seem puzzling and contradictory to Van Til because on the one hand, Dooyeweerd emphasizes fundamental religious presuppositions which influence every part of theoretical thought, and on the other, he seems to claim that there is a certain fundamental structure of thought which is beyond religious presupposition.

Thus, Van Til criticizes that “Was he not, even in the W.d.W., again and again speaking of the very structure of theoretical thought itself as requiring a religious starting-point in the human self and then beyond the human self in an absolute Origin?” And now, since Van Til thinks that Dooyeweerd is claiming a certain fundamental, universal structure which does not require religious presuppositions, he states, “I cannot be happy about your restriction, by your sharpening of your transcendental method. If I must take your restriction at face value, ... then I can not follow you.”

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25 Dooyeweerd, Jerusalem and Athens, 76. (italics his).
26 Ibid., 77.
27 Ibid., 95-98.
believes that in Dooyeweerd’s thought, there exists “a basic dualism between [his] religious convictions on this point and [his] process of rationalization.”

However, before we move on, we have to ask whether Van Til’s interpretation of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental criticism is fair to his original thought. According to my reading of Dooyeweerd’s response to Van Til, Van Til’s quotations above and understanding of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental criticism and his main thesis are quite one-sided readings of Dooyeweerd’s intention.

First of all, I think that Van Til, obsessed with his apologetic concern and thus his problematic ‘absolute antithesis’ doctrine, could not understand what problem Dooyeweerd tries to solve by proposing his transcendental method.

I understand that when Dooyeweerd proposed his transcendental critique, Dooyeweerd felt that it was needed to explain the common experience of communication and debate between different religious groups, after he had first claimed that religious elements exist in all theoretical thought and thus cause communication breakdown. Otherwise, his thesis would result in the denial of our common experience of communication and understanding between different prejudical groups. To meet this need, he proposes his transcendental critique in his overall scheme. In other words, this is to say that we have to understand that his alleged ‘universal’ states of affairs and structure of thought is still related to his basic thesis. That is, the states of affairs and the structure of thought are still derived from Dooyeweerd’s own philosophy and his religious conviction. Thus, his universal state of affairs can not be the final foundation for all. Otherwise, Dooyeweerd would be arguing for a simple antinomy in his thesis.

28 Ibid., 109.
Likewise, looking at his *New Critique*, in “the first way,” Dooyeweerd emphasized the fact that the structure of theoretical thought requires a religious starting point. Only after that, in his “second way,” he tried to explain by transcendental method what can be the fundamental common foundation to make our communication possible between different religiously motivated groups. In this double scheme, Dooyeweerd uses such words in Van Til’s quotations as “universally valid conditions,” “turning to an exclusive analysis of the theoretical attitude of thought as such,” “the ultimate theoretical foundation of philosophy”, “such a confession is out of place.”

Seen from this view, it should be noted that Van Til’s quotations above ignore the fact that when Dooyeweerd uses words such as “universal condition”, “ultimate theoretical foundation,” “fundamental foundation,” he, still, at the same time, presupposes the fundamental fact of the existence of religious factors in every theoretical thought. Thus, they are at least not religiously final words, but only theoretical foundations.

In the same way, when he says, as Van Til quoted, “the transcendental critique of theoretical thought ... is the ultimate theoretical foundation of philosophy”, Dooyeweerd immediately adds the prerequisite condition just in the next sentence, that is, “This critique is, however, not to be considered as a self-sufficient philosophical basic science, since it gives a theoretical account of the supra-philosophical hypothesis of all philosophical thought.” That is, this theoretical account of a supra-theoretical hypothesis which is made by a transcendental critique is not self-sufficient. It still requires a certain external element and it is itself under the supra-theoretical hypothesis. Thus, when Dooyeweerd says that the transcendental critique seeks “the ultimate theoretical
foundation,” this claim should not be isolated from its being grounded in religious dimensions of theoretical thought, but they should instead be read with their prerequisite context.

Likewise, when Dooyeweerd says, as Van Til quoted, “In this first phase of the critical investigation such a confession would be out of place,” it seems not reasonable to understand by this claim that Dooyeweerd denies the fact that every theoretical thought requires a religious foundation. To understand it in this way is hardly a correct view of Dooyeweerd's thesis because, if this is true, it is too obvious that Dooyeweerd's thesis contains an antinomy. Thus, I think we should regard Dooyeweerd's claim as made in the process of finding common ground, to make possible communication between differing religious presupposition groups. But only after he has established the existence of religious elements in all theoretical thought. Thus, we should understand, only in this context, does Dooyeweerd make the claim that one should not start with one's own religious conviction (confession).

In this sense, I think what exists in Dooyeweerd's scheme is not a 'basic dualism,' as Van Til stated, but 'double purposes,' that is, first to discover the religious element in all theoretical thought and thus, to uncover the pretended autonomy of human reason. And secondly, at the same time, to find the way to save our common experience of communication between different schools by means of a transcendental method.

Seen from this understanding of Dooyeweerd's original intention, I think that Van Til's criticism is a one-sided understanding of Dooyeweerd's thesis. Further, I believe that Van Til's failure of understanding Dooyeweerd's thesis is caused by Van Til's insistence on his problematic absolute antithesis doctrine, which I will discuss later.
Now, let us turn to Dooyeweerd's response to the second criticism, namely, that he appeals to supposedly "objective states of affairs" that have an objectivity not depending upon the truths of Scripture.29

In the first place, Dooyeweerd rejects Van Peursen's criticism that Dooyeweerd conceived the states of affairs in the sense of 'brute facts' apart from their meaning, as "an erroneous opinion."30 It is simply because, Dooyeweerd says, "If this were true there would naturally exist a striking antinomy between my conception of the 'states of affairs' and my fundamental view concerning the meaning-character of creaturely reality."31

This is true because Dooyeweerd has been saying (in fact it is his core thesis) that the states of affairs are of a dynamic meaning-character, that is, they refer outside and above themselves to "the universal meaning-context in time, to the creaturely unity of the root and to the absolute Origin of all meaning."32 In other words, for him, all states of affairs or facts are not self-sustained but always contingent in relation to their Origin. Judging from these statements, I think that it seems more consistent to understand that Dooyeweerd does not regard the states of affairs as "brute fact apart from their meaning."

And furthermore, Dooyeweerd argues against the idea of objectivity by saying that he has never said that the states of affairs can be "objective" both to Christian and non-Christian, because he mentions that he obviously recognizes that the meaning character of the states of affairs he contends is derived from his "religious presupposition resulting from the biblical ground-motive of [his] philosophical thought,"33 so that he knows that

29 Ibid., 81.
30 Ibid., 79.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 80.
33 Ibid., 81.
immaneant philosophers would not agree with this way of understanding reality (states of affairs). Thus, after this statement of Dooyeweerd himself, it seems to me difficult to accuse Dooyeweerd of contending that his ‘states of affairs’ “have an objectivity not depending upon the truths of Scripture.”

However, Van Til thinks that this does not solve any problem at all on the side of Dooyeweerd, simply because Van Peursen’s target of criticism does not consist in the fact of the meaning-character of creaturely reality (states of affairs), but in the transcendental “meaning-structures” of the states of affairs which Dooyeweerd asserts are “not founded in our subjective consciousness, but in the divine order of creation to which our subjective experience is subject. For this very reason they also cannot be dependent upon the religious conviction of the investigator, so that they may be discovered in a particular context by both Christian and non-Christian thinkers.” By this statement, Van Peursen understands that Dooyeweerd’s contention is that all creaturely reality (state of affairs) is contingent to its Origin, but its structure is objectively given so that it can be objectively discovered by both groups as the same, regardless of their religious conviction. That is, Van Peursen is claiming that for Dooyeweerd, while the meaning of ‘tree’, for example, will be differently understood between those who have different religious preunderstandings (here, Christian and non-Christian), the modal (meaning) structure of tree is divinely given and discovered objectively by both Christian and non-Christian thinkers.

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid. (italics mine)
36 Ibid., 79
Therefore, in this case, Van Til concludes that there has been a confusion of terminology between Dooyeweerd and Van Peursen. Dooyeweerd understood by ‘states of affairs’ the meaning character of states of affairs, while Van Peursen took it as the law structure of states of affairs. When Van Peursen claimed that Dooyeweerd's states of affairs are ‘brute fact apart from their meaning,’ he is referring to the latter aspect of states of affairs. With this understanding, Van Til claims that Dooyeweerd claimed “to use a transcendental method that is not directly dependent upon the truths of Scripture” and appealed “to supposedly objective states of affairs that have an objectivity not depending upon the truths of Scripture.”

However, I believe that just like Van Til's first criticism of transcendental method, here, the same type of misunderstanding occurs. First of all, I think that Van Peursen distorted Dooyeweerd's intention in the statement quoted, disregarding its context. When he mentioned that “the states of affairs are not founded in our subjective consciousness,” Dooyeweerd started the statement with a precondition. Let me quote it fully. “In fact it was nothing but a result of my biblical conviction that the ‘states of affairs’ .... are not founded in our subjective consciousness, but in the divine order of creation to which our subjective experience is subject....” In this quotation, two points should be noted against Van Peursen's interpretation. First of all, when Dooyeweerd claims that there exists a certain objective structure, it is not objective in the positivistic sense, because he does not mean that the structure is discovered by universally common agreement but it is “nothing but a result of [his] biblical conviction.” So the objectivity of Dooyeweerd is still based on his deeper biblical presupposition.
Secondly, when Dooyeweerd states that the objective structure of reality belongs to “the divine order of creation,” he never says that this divine order is objectively discovered. Rather, he goes on to explain,

It is not so that the discovery of “states of affairs” is seen by everybody in that way. It may be that they are immediately given a philosophical interpretation. The “states of affairs” may also be too hastily interpreted in terms of a particular conception of the modal meaning-structure concerned which turns out to be liable to justified criticism. This is why I consider it a critical requirement to suspend our philosophical interpretation of the “states of affairs” at issue until we have so many of them at our disposal.37

In this statement, Dooyeweerd never says that the objective divine order is objectively discovered. Rather, he says that it requires studious efforts to reach consensus, but without guarantee of any total consensus.

With these statements, it seems hard, contrary to Van Til and Van Peursen's charge, to say that Dooyeweerd's “states of affairs” can be said to be objectively discovered and that we can reach final consensus in the positivistic sense.

Consequently, I believe that Van Til’s and Van Peursen's criticism of Dooyeweerd's objectivity does not do full justice to Dooyeweerd's text.

In summarizing these two criticisms of Van Til, I think I can say that on the one hand Van Til's understanding of Dooyeweerd is partial and thus ends in misunderstanding. But on the other, I think that it is true that there is some circular argument in Dooyeweerd's thesis. He rightly contends for the existence of religious

37 Ibid., 80.
factors in all theoretical thought, but in order to explain and demonstrate the fact, it is true that he appeals to the universal structure of theoretical thought. But he immediately claims that this universal structure is also rooted in a more fundamental religious conviction.

How did he deal with this seemingly circular argument? If we consider his context of modern times, we can assume that he did not acutely realize this situation. But, first of all, to examine this problem in Dooyeweerd, I think we need to look more closely into Dooyeweerd's notion of the states of affairs and the structure of theoretical thought. Thus, in the following, I will examine Dooyeweerd's analysis of the notions of the states of affairs and the structure of theoretical thought mainly from his “Prolegomena” of *A New Critique*, though often also referring to the rest of his work.

C. The Possibility of Circular Argument in Early Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy on the Common Ground

1) General View of Dooyeweerd’s Philosophy in the “Prolegomena” of *A New Critique*

Let me first articulate Dooyeweerd’s main thesis, because his thesis is complicated and it is worth to explain it somewhat at length.
In the ‘Prolegomena’ of *A New Critique*, Dooyeweerd introduces two “ways” to the transcendental critique of philosophic thought. In “the first way,” (I. pp. 1-21)\(^{38}\) he presents the general summary including the general purpose of his new critique and the main problems which will be treated in his work. He says, “these single introductory theses contain in themselves the entire complex of problems involved in a discussion of the possibilities of genuine philosophy” (I. p.4). Here, he lays bare the problem of the uncritically accepted dogma of the autonomy of reason (or theoretical thought), and attempts to show “from above” that the nature of philosophic thought is directed to the origin of cosmic reality which transcends the modal aspects.\(^{39}\)

And in the “second way” (I. pp. 22ff), dealing with the same problem to a great extent, Dooyeweerd argues and attempts to prove the presence of this religious presupposition or a priori in theoretical thought.

The first stage: the first transcendental problem
(What do we abstract from naive experience?)

For this purpose, Dooyeweerd divides his transcendental critique into three transcendental problems.\(^{40}\) In the first stage, Dooyeweerd characterizes the theoretical attitude of thought in contrast to the pre-theoretical attitude of naive experience.\(^{41}\)

For Dooyeweerd, reality in its howness manifests a number of modal aspects, and naive experience is possible only in the coherence of all the modalities of reality. We

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\(^{40}\) Dooyeweerd raises three transcendental problems and Dr. Conradie suggests to divide Dooyeweerd’s scheme into four stages, for the convenience of explanation. Here I will follow Conradie’s division.
experience reality in everyday life with this coherence of modality without splitting up each modality. But the characteristic of theoretical thought is "abstractive or analytical," because it "separates the unbroken texture of naive experience into different modalities or aspects." Consequently, this results in an antithetical relation between "the logical, i.e. the analytical function of our real act of thought" and "the non-logical aspects of our temporal experience" (I. p. 39). In this relation, we should be careful to see that this antithetical relation is not between the subject (self, thinking I) and the object (thing in its unity) but is "only regarding the logical aspect of our act of thought as opposite to the non-logical aspects of reality." 

With this analysis, Dooyeweerd acutely points out that the perennial problem of the traditional theory of knowledge originates from the fact that the subject-object relation is falsely identified with the antithetic Gegenstand-relation between the logical aspect and the non-logical aspects. (I. p. 43.)

The second stage: the second transcendental basic problem
(the archimedean point of theoretical synthesis)

Thus, we have found the true poles of the antithetic relation in theoretical thought, which are the logical aspect and non-logical aspects rather than the thinking self and the object in its unity.

41 He summarizes the first stage in this question: "What do we abstract in the antithetic attitude of theoretic thought from the structures of empirical reality given in naive experience, and how is this abstraction possible?" (I. p. 41).
42 Conradie, A. L., p. 44.
And the second transcendental problem arises, according to Dooyeweerd, in the process of synthesizing the two poles of this antithetic relation (I. p. 45). In this synthesizing process, in the first place, it should be noted that the process should be started from a certain vantage point from which one can see the total view of reality which must transcend each of the aspects, because, in order to synthesize two aspects, the synthesizing factor shouldn't be within one of the poles and must be outside of the two poles. Thus, Dooyeweerd says, it is evident that “the true starting-point of theoretical synthesis, however it may be chosen, is in no case to be found in one of the two terms of the antithetic relation” (I. p. 45). In other words, now we need “an archimedean point” by which we can achieve “an inclusive glance over all these aspects of reality abstracted from naive experience.”

With this analysis, Dooyeweerd again reveals the problem of the traditional theory of knowledge. He claims that in the traditional theory of knowledge, one of these non-logical aspects of our experience has mistakenly been taken as the synthesizing starting point and the aspect has been absolutized. In this case, the whole reality is interpreted by the one aspect and this eventually results in so-called "isms" in philosophy.

From this analysis, Dooyeweerd concludes that to achieve “a totality view of reality” we need to choose the archimedean point in the self (ego), because in all acts of interpretation of our experience, the self is necessarily a synthesizing factor. Thus, Dooyeweerd calls it “a subjective totality”, “a concentration point of all the modal aspects.” (I. p. 51).

44 Conradie, 47.
Therefore, we arrive at the stage that a deeper knowledge of the self is required to attain to the totality of meaning. In this sense, Dooyeweerd reminds us of Socrates’ aphorism by saying that “know thyself must indeed be written above the portals of philosophy” (I. p. 5).

The third stage: the third transcendental problem

Thus, the third transcendental problem arises, which Dooyeweerd puts as follows: “How is this critical self-reflection, this concentric direction of theoretical thought to the I-ness, possible, and what is its true character?” (I. p. 52).

This question is necessary because we have seen that according to Dooyeweerd, on the one hand, a theoretical account is dealing only with aspects of our experience of the self and on the other hand, since the self, “I-ness,” transcends this diversity of aspects, it cannot become a Gegenstand to the logical function. In other words, theoretical accounts of the self are only aspects of the human self. Thus the totality of the self cannot be comprehended by a theoretical account (I. p. 51).

Then, how can we attain to the knowledge of the person and what kind of knowledge is it? In explaining this nature of self-knowledge, Dooyeweerd writes that, though the self is the concentration point of all the modal aspects, it is still meaning contingent to its origin, thus, can be understood only in the light of its true or pretended origin. Thus, “self-knowledge in the last analysis appears to be dependent on knowledge of God” (I. p. 55). However, Dooyeweerd continues, this knowledge of God is different from a theoretical knowledge of God, because the latter is still the result of the synthesis of the logical aspect of thought with a non-logical Gegenstand, which is the modality of
faith. So Dooyeweerd terms this kind of knowledge of God “supra-theoretical”
knowledge, in the sense that it is religious and rooted in the human heart, and thus
transcends all theoretical proof.

Finally, as a consequence of these three stages of transcendental critique,
Dooyeweerd's main thesis emerges. That is, since the “self” is the concentration point of
all the modal aspects and self-knowledge is dependent on the supra-theoretical
knowledge of God, all theoretical thought has, in turn, a supra-theoretical origin.

The fourth stage: the four fundamental religious motives

With this conclusion, Dooyeweerd proceeds to the fourth stage of the critique,
where he introduces four fundamental religious motives in Western thought45 which are
reduced to two more fundamental religious motives: The first is the motive of Creation,
fall, and redemption in Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Ghost and the second
is that of the spirit of apostasy from the true God.46 The latter leads the heart in an
idolatrous direction, and is thus the source of all absolutizing of creation or creaturely
aspects.

Consequently, as a result of his transcendental critique, Dooyeweerd ends up with
the conclusion that there is a fundamental antithesis in philosophical thought between
Christian and apostate thinking. Hence, there are two fundamental types of philosophy:
Christian philosophy and immanentist philosophy. Dooyeweerd writes:

45 For this account, first of all, he shows the true starting point of philosophy in its fullest sense is not the
religious motive of an individual person but of the community in which the individual person shares and
accepts the spirit of the community. Cf. Conradie, 52. “The thinker, indeed, can fashion this motive
according to his individual view, but the motive itself is supra-individual” (I, p. 61).
46 Dooyeweerd, H., Transcendental Problem of Philosophical Thought, p. 60.
There exists only one ultimate and radical antithesis in philosophy, viz. that between absolutizing, that is, deifying of meaning, in apostasy from God on the one hand, and on the other hand the return of philosophic thought in Christ to God, which leads to the insight into the complete relativity and lack of self-sufficiency of all that exists in the created mode of meaning. (I. p. 123.)

2) The Problem of Communication

However, after all, this conclusion necessarily raises a problem of communication from the view point of critics such as de Vos, Conradie, Van Til. They think that because different philosophies are rooted in different religious presuppositions which can not be proved in a theoretical way, people are not likely to succeed in understanding or communicating with each other. People will talk through each other. And the critics think that Dooyeweerd actually “substantiates the situation” when he writes: “It would be pure illusion if one should imagine he could convince his opponents in a purely theoretical way that a stand-point is in itself true or false. For in that question are concerned the thinker’s religious convictions, which as sure are not capable of theoretical discussion.”

From this passage, Dooyeweerd’s critics understand that according to Dooyeweerd, it is impossible to criticize a philosophy from the view point of another philosophy, because one view point is ‘extrinsic’ to the other’s. And they ask, doesn’t this contradict what has happened in the whole history of philosophy? We know that the whole history of philosophy is the communicating, debating and so developing process,

47 Transcendental Problems of Philosophical Thought, p. viii.
48 Conradie, p. 62.
showing the obvious fact that philosophers could understand and communicate with each other.\(^4^9\)

This is the burden of prof. de Vos's criticism. He writes, "The starting point of [Dooyeweerdians'] philosophy causes the antithesis .... There exists an antithesis between Scriptural and non-Scriptural thought, which, practically speaking, means between the *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* and all other philosophies. This antithesis is so final that all attempt at synthesis must be rejected ...... This line of division is not halted by science and philosophy, but on the contrary runs right through them. .... Therefore the followers of this philosophy cannot expect that others should grasp, least of all accept, their philosophy."\(^5^0\) Thus, de Vos even suspects Dooyeweerd's philosophy to be a solipsism.\(^5^1\)

However, is this criticism derived from a correct understanding of Dooyeweerd?

On this problem, we soon find that Dooyeweerd's thesis is more complicated than de Vos understood, because Dooyeweerd also fully recognized this problem and writes,

What now is the fruit of this transcendental critique of thought for the discussion among the philosophical schools? It can *pave the way for a real contact of thought* (my italic) among the various philosophical trends. For - paradoxical as it may sound - this contact is basically excluded on the dogmatic standpoint of the autonomy of theoretical reason. Our transcendental critique wages a merciless war against the masking of supra-theoretical prejudices as theoretical axioms which are forced upon the opponent on penalty of his being viewed as an outsider in philosophical matters. In other words, it aims its attack against the *dogmatic exclusivism* of the schools, all of which fancy themselves to possess the monopoly on philosophical truth (I. p. 70).

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\(^4^9\) Ibid.


\(^5^1\) Ibid.
Dooyeweerd here, at the same time, argues for the existence of common ground among the different philosophical schools, after he has claimed that all theoretical thought has its supra-theoretical religious origin, and further, he himself also recognizes this sounds paradoxical. Then, how is this common ground possible in his transcendental critique after the claim that every theoretical thought has a supra-theoretical origin?

Let us firstly see the critics’ understanding. Basically, the critics believe that Dooyeweerd thinks he solves this problem by distinguishing between the structure of thought and the content of thought or between theoretical judgement and supra-theoretical pre-judices. For in several places, Dooyeweerd’s writings seem to support this assumption. For example, he continues the quotation above, “A sharp distinction between theoretical judgements and the supra-theoretical pre-judgements, which alone make the former possible, is a primary requisite of critical thought.” (I. p.70). And again, he states, “It will never break the community of philosophical thought with the other philosophical trends, because it has learned to make a sharp distinction between philosophical judgement and the supra-theoretical prejudices which lay the foundation of every possible philosophy.” (I. p. 115.)

From this statement, Dr. Conradie, one of Dooyeweerd’s critics, understands that for Dooyeweerd, the structure of thought is “an empty framework” or “receptivity” which is the same for all, but it is filled by a different content which depends upon supra-theoretical religious presuppositions. Therefore, Conradie believes, Dooyeweerd thinks

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52 Conradie, 199.
53 Ibid., 153.
that at least communication is possible between different philosophies, because they have the same structure of thought.\textsuperscript{54}

With this understanding, critics raise questions and doubts whether his philosophy is really consistent. For the very aim of critique has been to show that every theoretical thought is influenced by religious presuppositions, even including the dogma of the autonomy of theoretical reason. And now, on the contrary, it seems to his critics that Dooyeweerd claims that there is a certain area of neutrality free from the religious a priori.

However, in order to clarify and examine this problem fully, I think that we need to investigate still more of what Dooyeweerd means by the "structure of thought" and the "structural states of affairs" with a view to his whole project.

3) Discussion of the Notions of ‘the States of Affairs’ and ‘the Structure of Thought’

According to Dr. Conradie, the first mention of this issue appears briefly after the second transcendental problem.\textsuperscript{55} After the second stage, Dooyeweerd asks himself whether what he has done up to this stage is "proving stringently." In other words, he asks whether or not this structure of thought he has discovered up to the second stage is derived from his own religious conviction and thus can’t be claimed to be an undeniable proof for all the people, irrespective of religious a priori. And Conradie claims that Dooyeweerd affirms that what he has done is "proof," so that everyone cannot but agree,
because he mentions that his discovered structure of theoretical thought "may no longer be ignored by anyone who appreciates a veritably critical standpoint in philosophy." (I. p. 56).

Conradie also shows that Dooyeweerd further concludes, contrary to the objection of the vicious circle that "if theoretical synthesis is possible only from a supra-theoretical starting-point, then only the contents of the supra-theoretical presuppositions implied thereby, can be questionable, but not the very necessity of them (Italics mine)" (Ibid.). From this passage, Conradie understands that Dooyeweerd contends that his discovered structure of theoretical thought up to the second stage is an undeniable state of affairs.

With this understanding, she raises the question, "the real question is how the claim of the critique to be a proof can be reconciled with his own critical demand that all thought must necessarily proceed from a religious presupposition."56

On this seemingly logical criticism, however, I think Conradie misses some important points here and reads into her intention. Firstly, it cannot be said from the statement quoted above by Dr. Conradie that Dooyeweerd clearly claims that his discovered structure is an undeniable state of affair, because in the same sentence, Dooyeweerd said that his discovered structure is necessarily accepted only "by anyone who appreciates". This does not mean that his discovered structure can be a universal claim. And secondly and foremostly, Dooyeweerd, recognizing this problem, says just in the following passage that his transcendental criticism is never meant to be "unprejudiced,"

It is of course impossible that this transcendental criticism - although up to the question of self-knowledge being of a strictly theoretical character - itself should be unprejudiced. For in that case it would refute its own conclusions. But what shall we say, if the very supra-theoretical presuppositions hold here, which free theoretical [thought] from dogmatic ‘axioms’ standing in the way of a veritable critical attitude? (I. p. 56).

Here, Dooyeweerd simply asserts that his discovered structure of theoretical thought cannot be ‘unprejudiced,’ but further, he suggests a certain way in which the supra-theoretical presuppositions ‘hold.’ So, even though it is true that how this ‘holding’ is possible still needs discussion, we can say at least that Dooyeweerd’s account of the state of affairs is more complicated than Conradie’s simplified account.

Let us see another place where Dooyeweerd deals with states of affairs. It appears in the introduction of “the modal structure of meaning” in book II, where Dooyeweerd writes that the states of affairs are “the same for everybody” and “a common basis for philosophical discussion.” (I. p. 73). He says,

the states of affairs described in the preceding introductory examinations [regarding modal spheres] urge themselves upon the human mind as soon as they have been detected, because they are really the same for everybody. But their discovery and the manner of description are not independent of a religious starting-point….. Therefore, I can agree without hesitation that the preceding inquiry into the states of affairs implied in the fundamental analogical concepts was not unprejudiced in a religious sense. But I must at the same time deny that this circumstance detracts from the fact that the ‘states of affairs’ here intended are a common basis for philosophical discussion. (Italics mine.) (I. p. 73).

From this passage, Conradie understands only one side of Dooyeweerd’s words. She claims that Dooyeweerd’s state of affairs that is the same for everybody is here his

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56 Conradie, p. 134.
discovered ‘modal structure of meaning’ and she also says that “It only becomes a problem when we ask how this is compatible with the doctrine of antithesis, and whether it involves Dooyeweerd in the hypothesis of a pretheoretical neutral sphere of consciousness.”

However, it seems to me very clear that Dooyeweerd’s claim is more than that. Consider just the next sentence to the one Conradie quoted. Dooyeweerd says that “but their discovery and the manner of description are not independent of a religious starting-points” and he also says that “the preceding inquiry .... was not unprejudiced”. And on the next page, Dooyeweerd states,

It is impossible to eliminate the religious starting-point of theoretical thought. But it is not impossible to perform a provisional epoche of all specific philosophical interpretations of the states of affairs which are to be established in a precise way before we try to account for them in a philosophical theory. (I. pp. 73, 4.)

After his claim for the common states of affairs, Dooyeweerd here also re-emphasizes that “it is impossible to eliminate the religious element from theoretical thought,” but he, at the same time, suggests a certain way that it is possible to bracket the influence from a religious a priori by a provisional epoche.

It is true that we can still ask how the provisional epoche is possible. But at least we can say that he does not simply claim that his views of the ‘structure of theoretical thought’ and the ‘modal structure of meaning’ are universal and so ‘unprejudiced.’

As a consequence of our observation so far, I think we can say that differently from his critics' one-sided reading, Dooyeweerd’s claim has both sides. Though he says

57 Conradie, p.143.
certain structures of thought and states of affairs are “the same for all” and even have “universal validity”, he does not mean that his states of affairs and structures of thought are epistemologically neutral and positivistically foundational, but, when we have a broader view of his whole project, his point is always that he acknowledges that they are all derived from his Biblical presupposition and thus cannot escape from the influence of a certain point of view.

Further, I think it is important to understand Dooyeweerd’s position to recognize the reason why he is insisting on the existence of common ground seemingly contradictory to his main thesis. It is only because he needed to explain the common phenomenon of communication between different religious groups, which his critics, especially Van Til, has never taken into consideration.

Thus, first of all, I can conclude that the critics' criticism of the existence of the common ground in Dooyeweerd’s philosophy does not do full justice to Dooyeweerd's intention and his texts.

But it is true that we can further ask a question, ‘Did he succeed in finding the common ground, in the sense that he still claims that his “common” states of affairs also can’t escape from his prejudice?’ Thus, it is likely that Dooyeweerd's argument is subject to the criticism of circular argument. His argument seems to go like this; he says, firstly, all theoretical thought has a religious starting-point and then there is a certain common ground for all and then this common ground is again based on a certain religious point of view.
Again, I do not think Dooyeweerd acutely realized this problem, considering the context of his modern times. But I think he tried to give an answer to this problem, after many accusations of circular argument, by clarifying the notions of states of affairs and structure of thought. Thus, I think we need to see another description of the character of the structure of thought and of the states of affairs.

In an article, Dooyeweerd describes how his whole critique is of ontological character.

This [communication between different religious a prioris] is made possible by the fact that this critique is founded in the *ontical* structure of philosophical thought, which is of universal validity, and is not based on a purely subjective prejudice.\(^{58}\)

And he explains in another article what he understands by the ‘ontical’ structure of theoretical thought. Conradie provides a part of the article with her interpretation.

‘Ontical’ means ‘founded in the temporal order of reality,’ and as such, unchangeable and not subject to historical development. The structure of thought is, firstly, of a logical nature, but the order of time connects this logical aspect with all other modal aspects of reality. Its second structural characteristic is the antithetical relation between the analytical sphere and its field of research. Finally, the modal structure of the *Gegenstand* must be considered as part of the structure of thought. These are all states of affairs of universal validity. Dooyeweerd emphasizes that not a subjective, purely epistemological a priori, but an ontical structural a priori, guarantees the possibility of a theoretical community of thought, situated in the ‘nature’ of theoretical thought as such.\(^{59}\)

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\(^{58}\) H. Dooyeweerd, “De Transcendentale Critiek van het Wijsgeerig Denken,” *Phil. Ref.* 6, 1941, p. 18.
Here, Dooyeweerd emphasizes that the structure of theoretical thought is of ontological character and he is not referring to an epistemological foundation, and we can also notice that he now adds the 'logical nature' to the characteristic of the structure of theoretical thought.

Consequently, if Dooyeweerd's common ground is of ontological character, I think, we can arrive at a certain common ground which makes it possible for Dooyeweerd's common ground argument to escape from circular argument. I think this position is the key to understand Dooyeweerd's position on common ground without hurting his main thesis. So I will try to propose this ontological common ground is the only common ground to escape from all the problems.

However, before we go on with my proposal, let us see two other conclusions drawn from Dooyeweerd's writings on the problem of common ground.

First, as we have noted in the case of his critics, Van Til, Conradie and Van Peursen, some might interpret Dooyeweerd's philosophy as implying that there is an obvious contradiction and therefore, his philosophy will not be sustained and is a failure.

Dr. Conradie interprets Dooyeweerd's philosophy in this way. She analyses that Dooyeweerd's 'structure of theoretical thought' itself must be derived from his own cosmonomic philosophical presupposition and thus cannot be unprejudiced.\(^{60}\) Consequently, he has failed to provide common ground between different philosophical schools. Therefore, Dr. Conradie concludes that Dooyeweerd's philosophy itself is a

\(^{60}\) Conradie, p. 143.
failure, since she believes that any philosophy which denies the common ground (in other words, epistemological foundation) cannot be accepted as sound philosophy. She says,

It thus appears that the proof of the critique not only assumes what must be proved, but assumes at every step of the argument what must be proved. The critique fails, not because as a proof it accepts the doctrine of the autonomy of reason, but because it is both *a circulus vitiosus* and *petitio principii*. If the critiques has failed, it means, firstly, that Dooyeweerd has failed to prove his claim that the critique is the final theoretical foundation of philosophy, .... It means, secondly, that Dooyeweerd has failed to find a point of contact between philosophies proceeding from radically different points of departure. On the contrary, in so far as his own philosophical position and the critique itself is wholly determined by the content of his basic idea, it reveals the same dogmatic exclusivism characteristic of immanentist philosophy.\(^\text{61}\)

But it seems to me this criticism is mistaken, because it is based on an overly simple analysis: Dooyeweerd asserts that all theoretical thoughts start from their religious a priori but *his* discovered structure of states of affairs is neutral and universal and thus, this ends in an obvious contradiction. Hence, Dooyeweerd's philosophy is a failure.

This criticism obviously neglects Dooyeweerd's true contention. Because what we have seen in Dooyeweerd's discussion is that Dooyeweerd himself clearly recognized and admitted this problem. But what he had in mind was to explain something more complicated. That is to explain the common experience of communication between different philosophical schools after the claim that all theoretical thought has a supra-theoretical religious origin. That is why he proposed his methodical "provisional epoche."

After all, if one emphasizes only the supra-theoretical religious element in theoretical thought, one will end up with nihilism or pernicious relativism, and to avoid

\(^{61}\) Conradie, p. 152.
this, one should provide a certain common ground. Our common experience requires this common ground. That is what Dooyeweerd has tried to claim and show.

In the case of Dr. Conradie, she presupposes that the prerequisite of sound philosophy is the existence of an epistemological foundation, and that is why she calls Dooyeweerd's philosophy a failure. But this position is exactly what Dooyeweerd tried to oppose by positioning himself against the autonomy of human reason.

Consequently, I believe that Conradie’s criticism does not do full justice to Dooyeweerd’s philosophy. Therefore, I will try to suggest another way to understand this phenomenon in a third option.

Secondly, in Van Til’s case, Van Til would never be bothered by seeking common ground, because there is only absolute antithesis. Thus, he would respond and claim that to avoid all of this inconsistency, the absolute antithesis should be maintained. Thus, there is no common ground and no genuine communication between the believer and the unbeliever. So he actually proposes that we need to contrive an “as-if” method to explain the common experience of our understanding and communicating between believers and unbelievers. However, this explanation will cause huge practical and doctrinal problems. In the next chapter, I will examine Van Til’s absolute antithesis doctrine and show that this option cannot be a solution for the common ground problem.

Thirdly, as a consequence, I will propose that while there always exists the influence of religious presuppositions over all parts of our theoretical thought, a certain common territory is, at the same time, needed which is, however, not derived from an epistemological common ground, but derived from a metaphysical or ontological common ground. This position, I believe, Dooyeweerd clarifies in his ‘later’ article. Thus,
I will try to propose this third option with more elaboration. Before that, I will look at Van Til's response and the inevitable problems it raises.

4) Van Til's response

As I said before, the centre of Van Til's criticism of Dooyeweerd lies in his transcendent method. That is, he continuously insists that the Christian story should always be presupposed from the outset of any theoretical thought. Thus he cannot follow Dooyeweerd's transcendental way. He says,

Yet you are at the same time insisting that you can analyze the nature and structure of theoretical thought without any reference to that Christian story. .... On this basis theoretical thought is not itself a part of that story. I cannot follow you at this point.62

You seem to me not to have given [Creation, fall and redemption] their proper place at the outset of the argument, and you have not presented them as the presupposition of the possibility of analyzing the structure of theoretical thought and experience. You have, it appears, by your [transcendental critique], definitely excluded the contents of biblical teaching as having the basically determinative significance for your method of transcendental criticism.63

As evidence of his refutation, he cites what Dooyeweerd said in his letter which I quoted earlier: “A truly transcendental critique is, you say, obliged to begin .... ‘not with a confession of faith.’ In the first phase of the critical investigation such a confession would be out of place” and “The confrontation of the biblical and the non-biblical ground-

62 Van Til, Jerusalem and Athens, 102.
63 Ibid., 99 (his italics).
motives of theoretical thought belongs to the third and last phase of the transcendental
critique.\textsuperscript{64}

And Van Til says that “My contention over against this is, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that
this confrontation must be brought in at the first step, and that if it is not brought in at the
first step it cannot be brought in properly at the third step. But \textit{to say this amounts to}
saying that there is only one step or rather that there are no steps at all.”\textsuperscript{65}

With this view, Van Til even calls Dooyeweerd’s position a basic “dualism”
between his religious conviction and his process of rationalization. And furthermore, he
contends that there is no naive experience as a primary, pure datum any more than there
is anything like theoretical thought as such common to everyone.

Every item that man meets in his temporal horizon is \textit{already interpreted by God.}
It is the interpretation of the triune Creator-Redeemer God that every man meets
in his every experience of anything. This is the 'states of affairs' as it actually
exists.\textsuperscript{66}

Consequently, to be short, Van Til’s contention is that from the Biblical point of
view, the antithesis between Christian and non-Christian should be radical and absolute
and starts from the outset, while Dooyeweerd's antithesis is limited and thus leads to a
“softened” antithesis doctrine.

However, after this conclusion, Van Til must meet the question that Dooyeweerd
raises: Then, “what may be the common basis (contact point) for a philosophical
discussion between those who lack a common starting-point?”\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 108 (his italics).
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 109 (his italics).
\textsuperscript{67} Dooyeweerd, \textit{In the Twilight of the Western Thought}, 53 cited in Van Til, \textit{Jerusalem and Athens}, 113
In this regard, in Van Til's antithesis doctrine, there is no true contact point for a meaningful communication between the believer and the unbeliever, since Van Til has contended that there is only one kind of truth which is derived from the Scripture. No natural man can find the truth.

However, if Van Til's case is true, the problem of the necessity of Gospel witnessing and preaching naturally arises. If there is no contact point of truth, the unbelievers never understand what the believers preach and witness, so why preach and witness?

Thus, Van Til seems to be in trouble: on the one hand, he maintains the absolute antithesis between the believer and non-believer in their thinking; on the other hand, the Bible teaches us to preach the Gospel to the non-believers who, according to Van Til, can never understand truth and thus never be persuaded, because there is no contact point.

Regarding this problem, however, Van Til also does not deny the necessity of communicating with and preaching to the unbelievers, following the Scriptural lesson. So, he contrives a method of 'Christian epistemology' in which he suggests that a Christian method of argument with a non-Christian should be an "as-if" (ad hominem) method. That is, since the non-theists insist that "univocal reasoning" is the only possible kind of reasoning and Christian theists believe that "analogical reasoning" is the only kind of legitimate reasoning, there is no contact point. However, for the sake of communication or argument, Christian theists will stand on the non-theist position in

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68 According to Van Til, the only way of Christian reasoning or understanding of reality is re-interpretation of God's original understanding of reality which is shown in the Scripture. Therefore, Christian reasoning must be analogous to God's interpretation. By contrast, non-Christian reasoning is based on someone's own interpretation, not depending upon that of any higher one. Thus, it is not equivocal, but univocal. In this
order only to show how their position will be reduced to absurdity. So Christian theists, when engaged in argument or communication with the non-Christians, dialogue as-if their (the unbelievers') assumption is true, only to show their assumption cannot help but lead to absurdity and self-contradiction. This is the way Christian theists engage in dialogue with non-theists.69

However, I will examine this method further by looking into Van Til's overall system and reveal its illegitimacy and problems.

D. The Problems in Van Til's System

Van Til has contended that the antithesis in theoretical thought should be applied from the outset and in the totality of theoretical thought. Therefore, there is nothing like common ground, but only an absolute antithesis between Christian and non-Christian thinking, and thus the legitimate Christian method of communication with non-Christians is the so-called "as if" (ad hominem) method.

With this formulation, it might appear that Van Til's position holds more consistently to the antithesis doctrine than the position of Dooyeweerd in its radicalness. However, I will show in the following that Van Til's position raises huge problems which I believe eventually make his position untenable. In order to understand the problems that Van Til's doctrine raises, we need to deal, in the first place, with Van Til's underlying sense, univocal is a synonym of "autonomous" in Van Til's thought. Cf., Cornelius Van Til, A Survey of Christian Epistemology (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969), 200-209.  
69 Ibid., 200-209.
weak understanding of the Common Grace doctrine in comparison with that doctrine in both Dooyeweerd and Kuyper.

1) Critical Reflection on Van Til's Common Grace Doctrine

In his *New Critique*, Dooyeweerd devotes some pages to proposing a theological ground for the existence of universal states of affairs. He says,

> in our temporal cosmos God's Common Grace reveals itself, as Kuyper brought to light so emphatically, in the preservation of the cosmic world-order. Owing to this preserving grace the framework of the temporal refraction of meaning remains intact in spite of the effect of sin.70

Thus, Dooyeweerd believes that the created structure of cosmic world-order is preserved by God's Common Grace even in reprobated creation. Therefore, Dooyeweerd thinks that the Common Grace doctrine will support the existence of a common ground.

However, Van Til understands this doctrine differently. Rather, he believes that the Common Grace doctrine will support his absolute antithesis doctrine.

i) Kuyper's Common Grace Doctrine

Now, in order to compare Dooyeweerd with Van Til on the doctrine of Common Grace, the first step, I believe, is to compare Kuyper (who is the predecessor of Dooyeweerd in the Amsterdam school) with Van Til on this doctrine. It is because, firstly, Dooyeweerd, as belonging to the Amsterdam school, follows Kuyper on the doctrine of Common Grace. Secondly, Kuyper wrote much about this issue, while
Dooyeweerd does not deal much with theological issues. Thirdly, Van Til himself claims that his position on Common Grace is established as alternative to and improvement of that of Kuyper.

Thus, here, I will briefly show how Kuyper understands the doctrine of Common Grace. In Kuyper's three volumes entitled *De Gemeene Gratie*, Van Til explains, Kuyper describes general characteristics of God's Common Grace in two kinds: the first kind of Common Grace is a certain "restraint" of God upon the process of the sinful development of history and the second one is a certain "positive accomplishment" in history that the sinner is enabled to make through God's gifts.\(^7\) In addition to the first kind of Common Grace, Kuyper mentions,

Yet common grace could not stop at this first and constant [restraining] operation. Mere maintenance and control affords no answer to the question as to what end the world is to be preserved and why it has passed through a history of ages. If things remain the same why should they remain at all? If life were merely repetition why should life be continued at all? ... Accordingly there is added to this first constant operation of common grace .... another, wholly different, operation ... calculated to make human life and the life of the whole world pass through a process and develop itself more fully and richly .....\(^2\)

In addition, Kuyper describes the difference between these two operations of common grace by saying that in the constant (restraining) operation (of the first kind) God acts independently of humanity, while in the case of the progressive operation (of the second kind) humanity acts as "instrument and colaborer with God."\(^3\)

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\(^7\) Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique*, II. 33.


\(^3\) Ibid., 17.
After this general description, Kuyper reveals more specifically the epistemological implication of the general characteristics of Common Grace in his *Encyclopaedie*, in which Kuyper in the first place reveals the antithesis underlying science. He claims that “there must be a two fold development of science” corresponding to the antithesis doctrine. However, at the same time, he mentions that there exists a “broad territory of commonness along with the antithesis” which is not properly recognized thus far. Kuyper says, “This twofold development could not clearly be marked, in the past, whether there is a very broad territory where the differences between the two groups has no significance.”\(^{74}\) Regarding this point, Van Til explains,

as a reason for [the existence of such a very broad territory of commonness], Kuyper offers the fact that regeneration does not change our senses nor the appearance of the world around us. He therefore feels justified in concluding that the whole area of the more primitive observation, which limits itself to measuring, weighing, and counting is common to both.\(^{75}\)

And Kuyper himself states that “Whether something weighs two or three milligrams, may be absolutely determined by any one able to weigh”\(^{76}\) and that “At the beginning of scientific interpretation in the natural sciences, there is a common territory where the difference in starting-point and standpoint does not count.”\(^{77}\)

And later on, Kuyper designates this territory of commonness more specifically referring to three areas: the physical sciences, the lower spiritual sciences and logic.

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\(^{74}\) Ibid., 41.

\(^{75}\) Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 41.


\(^{77}\) Ibid., 42.
Thus, in spite of his antithesis doctrine, Kuyper believes God's Common Grace makes possible this 'lower' territory preserved as common both to believer and non-believer.\textsuperscript{78}

ii) Van Til's Common Grace Doctrine

However, Van Til does not agree with Kuyper and proposes a different paradigm to understand the Common Grace doctrine. The disagreement of Van Til is due to his reluctance to accept the consequence of Kuyper's position. In Van Til's view, Kuyper does not maintain an 'absolute' antithesis, and "any area of commonness, however small, is a justification for larger areas of commonness, till at last there is but one common area ..."\textsuperscript{79} Further, "by presupposing commonality in territories of knowledge, the existence of brute fact is acknowledged, i. e., bare, uninterpreted facts of reality and knowledge, over which the creature has final interpretative power ..."\textsuperscript{80} Van Til concludes that "by presupposing this existence, Amsterdam has practically conceded unmitigated autonomy to the creature."\textsuperscript{81}

Thus, in contrast and in order to overcome Kuyper's so-called "spatial"(territorial) paradigm, Van Til suggests a "temporal" paradigm of God's Common Grace.

Based on his extreme supralapsarian view, Van Til views history as nothing more than a preparation for the elect and the non-elect's predetermined final state,\textsuperscript{82} and before the fall (in his term, "earlier" stage), there was no apparent differentiation between the

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 43. Cited in Jan Van Vliet, 77.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 78.
elect and non-elect. So in this stage, he says, there was epistemological, spiritual and metaphysical common ground between the elect and non-elect “on the basis of the solidarity with Adam ...”83 And Van Til takes the common grounds of this stage as the result of God's Common Grace.84

But with the introduction of the fall into history, (in his term, “later” stage), as the elect and non-elect commence along a historical path of differentiation, all the possible common grounds, spiritual, epistemological and psychological, are lost, except for metaphysical commonness.

And, regarding the function of Common Grace in this post-fall stage, it lies in restraining the power to effect sin. And Van Til adds that what is worse is the fact that this restraining Common Grace is diminishing more and more in the course of history and that “God allows men to follow the path of their self-chosen rejection of Him more rapidly than ever toward the final consummation, while the grace increases toward the elect.”85

With this brief skeletal description of Van Til's model of the Common Grace doctrine, in order to contrast and help clarify the difference between the ‘spatial’ paradigm of Kuyper (or more broadly, Amsterdam School) and the ‘temporal’ paradigm of Van Til, let me use figures originally devised by Van Vliet with some of my modification.86

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83 Ibid.
84 Whether this general grace can be called Common Grace under our present concern is questionable. Generally, we understand the Common Grace doctrine was necessitated after the result of the Fall. This issue will be discussed later.
85 Ibid., 84.
In Kuyper’s paradigm, each circle represents the lower and the higher territories by believer and non-believer respectively. And in figure 1A, the common ground of the “lower territories” such as the physical sciences, the lower spiritual sciences and logic is indicated by the large overlapping area. By contrast, in Figure 1B, there is a small overlapping area, because there is not much commonness of study between believer and non-believer in “higher territories” such as ethics, theology, ... etc. According to this paradigm, there is much more possibility of cooperation between the believers and non-believers in lower territories than in higher territories, and this overlapping territory is preserved by God’s Common Grace after the Fall.

86 Cf. Jan van Vliet, “From Condition to State” 80,86.
By contrast, since Van Til believed that this territorial paradigm allows for territories of 'bare fact' and thus for the autonomy of the human creature, he thought it is necessary to redevelop the Common Grace doctrine based on his presuppositional (supralapsarian) philosophy of history.

![Figure 2](image)

In his paradigm represented by figure 2, Van Til claims that in the pre-fall (in his term, "earlier") stage, there was epistemological, spiritual (as possibility) and metaphysical commonness between elect and non-elect who were not yet existent, but did exist in Adam's body by virtue of humanity's solidarity in Adam. This commonality can be said to have been given by the "general grace" or "universal favor" before the fall. And Van Til regards this "general grace" also as common grace.

After the fall, as the result of sin, the differentiation proceeds and the degree of differentiation increases toward the final consummation (in the figure above, the
asymptotical line).\textsuperscript{88} In this stage, common grace has a certain function to restrain the effect of sin. But this restraining common grace diminishes toward non-elects as “God allows men to follow the path of their self-chosen rejection of Him more rapidly than ever toward the final consummation”\textsuperscript{89} and, by contrast, it increases toward the elect. Thus, the line is asymptotical on the opposite side,\textsuperscript{90} and in this post-fall stage, Van Til still believes that our metaphysical common ground is maintained, because, after the Fall, a human being functions still as human being.

As a result, while, for Kuyper, common grace allows for the existence of the common territories both for elect and non-elect and thus both elect and non-elect can cooperate to develop and realize the potentiality of creation, for Van Til, common grace lies, for the pre-fall stage, in the existence of the metaphysical commonness and the potential epistemological, spiritual commonness and, for the post-fall stage, in a diminishing power of restraint on the effect of sin and in maintaining metaphysical commonness. In this post-fall stage, since the epistemological and spiritual common ground as possibility was destroyed by the fall, there is no possibility of cooperation between elect and non-elect or, if any, “as-if” cooperation, if one still wants to call it cooperation.

iii) Critical Reflection on Van Til's doctrine

Van Til's new paradigm of the Common Grace doctrine tried to improve on Kuyper's model by replacing the “lower” and the “higher” territory of study with the

\textsuperscript{87} Common Grace and Gospel, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 84.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
"earlier" and the "later" stage of history and by this method, Van Til thinks he could establish an absolute antithesis without allowing any common ground, except for accepting metaphysical commonness as natural. However, as a matter of fact, as Van Til himself expected and mentioned about the difficulty of his paradigm ("We realize that the practical difficulties will always be great enough. We realize, too, that, theoretically, the question is exceedingly complicated, ...",91) his model of the Common Grace doctrine raises huge problems to the extent of making the possibility of the whole structure of his paradigm suspect.

In the first place, in his new paradigm of Common Grace, Van Til shows his confusion on the definition of common grace. In many places, we can notice the evidence that Van Til understands common grace in a quantitative way and he also identifies general grace in the pre-fall stage with common grace in the post-fall stage. Van Til wrote in his explanation of common ground.

It is evidence of earlier rather than of lower grace. All common grace is earlier grace. Its commonness lies in its earliness ...... It pertains to all the dimensions of life, but to all these dimensions ever decreasingly as the time of history goes on. At the very first stage of history there is much common grace. There is a common good nature under the common favor of God. But this creation-grace requires response.92

Van Til here understands that much more common grace existed before the Fall and it is diminishing as history proceeds. However, this notion of common grace makes us wonder if this notion really harmonizes with the Reformed doctrine of Common

90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 95.
92 Ibid., 82-3.
Grace. It is clear at least that Kuyper never understands common grace in a quantitative way. Then, how can Van Til justify his doctrine of Common Grace as a “Reformed” one?

And further, even though we concede this notion as new, Van Til seems to confuse the basic notion of common grace. He identifies the pre-fall “general favor or grace” with the common grace of our present concern when he states above that “at the very first stage of history there is much common grace. There is a common good nature under the common favor of God.” He regards here all the divine favor to Adam as common grace. Is this a justifiable notion of the common grace of our current concern? I think this notion is hardly to be called the common grace in the sense of our current definition, because the notion of common grace of our present discussion was needed to be introduced because of the occurrence of the Fall and because of the fact that people still receive God’s favor and common goodness in the cursed world. In order to explain this situation, we needed to introduce the notion of common grace. But Van Til calls all the favor from God, even before the Fall, ‘common grace.’ On this confusion of definition, Van Vliet suggests that this kind of pre-fall grace should be called simply a “general grace” of God toward his creature and also it should be an entirely “different genus” from the common grace under our present discussion.93 Kuyper also expressed likewise that common grace began in Paradise after the fall,94 and John Murray also interprets that “the fall introduced the very necessity of common grace.”95

93 Van Vliet, 88.
94 Kuyper, De gemeene Gratie, 3 Vols. (Leiden, 1902), 2.600; cited in Van Til, Common Grace, 16-17. (my italics)
Consequently, I believe that Van Til starts his new model of the Common Grace doctrine with the confusion of definition or at least a different (from the Reformed tradition) notion of common grace.

Secondly, if it is true that common grace is given in the pre-fall stage, as Van Til suggests, the subjects to whom the grace is given are ambiguous and how God's Grace is given and what is given as Common Grace is also not clear. Van Til often says that the non-elect exist in Adam before they actually exist in this world.

If we make the earlier our point of departure for the later we begin with something that believers and unbelievers have in common. That is to say, they have something in common because they do not yet exist. Yet they do exist. They exist in Adam as their common representative. They have seen the testimony of God in common. They have given a common good ethical reaction to this testimony, the common mandate of God. They are all mandate-hearers and covenant-keepers. God's attitude to all is the same. God has a favorable attitude to all. He beheld all the works of His hands, and behold, they were good. God was pleased with them.

According to this passage, in addition to their existence, the non-elect as embryo type in Adam's body also heard God's testimony, reacted to the testimony and saw God's handy works. With this extreme view, Van Til claims that common grace is given to these "not-yet-but existent" elects and non-elects.

However, against this description, Daane, one of Van Til's critics, expresses his objection pointedly. He argues that Van Til is a denier of common grace because for Van Til, all common grace is given to no one, that is, it is given before the creature comes into being. And in connection with the "cooperation" issue, Daane also criticizes Van Til for holding that "[metaphysical] commonality - on which all cooperation rests- is real only
when and insofar as the elect and reprobate do not yet exist. The as-if of Christian cooperation therefore is correlative with this unreal as-if commonality of non-existence. . . . Men have things in common because they do not yet exist. Commonality is the basis for cooperation. Christians may therefore cooperate with unbelievers to the extent that they do not yet exist. Just as God extends common grace to mankind in so far as it does not yet exist, so Christians may extend the spirit of cooperation to unbelieving mankind in so far as it does not yet exist.”

According to this acute criticism, Van Til’s Common Grace doctrine sounds simply unreal and abstract. It may be right in imagination and in principle, but it can hardly be real. And even though some might concede this description as real, as some supralapsarian theology might regard, questions still remain; that is, what kind of grace was given to them, and how did the grace affect the not-yet existents in Adam’s body?

Consequently, we can conclude that Van Til’s common grace in its “earlier” stage is an ambiguous notion; we do not know the exact beneficiaries and how they received it and what they received.

Thirdly, Van Til admits that in the post-fall stage, there exists common grace in the sense that it operates to restrain the effect of sin and he adds that this grace “will diminish still more in the further course of history.” But he never mentions any ‘progressive operation’ of common grace which makes cultural development by the unbelievers possible.

96 Common Grace and Gospel, p.72.
98 Common Grace and Gospel, 84.
Therefore, according to Kuyper's description, as we have seen earlier, this notion of common grace by Van Til is an obviously deficient understanding of the generally accepted Reformed doctrine of Common Grace, which maintains both sides of common grace: a constant (restraining) operation and a progressive operation. Jan van Vliet raises this point clearly.

While commending Kuyper for a broadening of perspective in the development of his common grace doctrine, it would appear that Van Til has himself forgotten this broader perspective in the formulation of his own model. For with the exception of some very rare intimations of God's general beneficence, Van Til's model focuses exclusively on, in Kuyper's words, the "constant" operation of common grace, abandoning pretty much altogether the "progressive" aspect.\textsuperscript{99}

But Cornelius Van Til's model, with its exclusive focus on the divine restraint of sin and with its curious neglect of the divine showering of general beneficence, can at best be considered a truncated conceptualization of the entire common grace field as developed by Kuyper and as affirmed by the Christian Reformed Church Synodical declaration of 1924 in Kalamazoo.\textsuperscript{100}

And further, Van Til needs to provide the Scriptural evidence in support of his claim that common grace in "later" history is always diminishing for the non-elect. He says,

Common grace will diminish still more in the further course of history. With every conditional act the remaining significance of the conditional is reduced. God increases His attitude of wrath upon the reprobate as time goes on, until at the end of time, at the great consummation of history, their condition has caught up with their state. On the other hand God increases his attitude of favor upon the elect, until at last, at the consummation of history, their condition has caught up with their state.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{99} Jan Van Vliet, 91.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{101} Van Til, \textit{Common Grace and Gospel}, 83.
However, is this the normative Scriptural principle of God's dealings with humanity through the time of grace? Van Vliet suggests that the opposite conclusion is rather biblically warranted, because we see many places in the Scripture that prophets and psalmists are lamenting the paradox of the prosperity of the wicked. For example, to mention just one of many examples, the psalmist, in psalm 73, deplores that he saw “the prosperity of the wicked” and that “they are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills” and that the pious, by contrast, “all day long have been plagued; [they] have been punished every morning.” (Ps. 73:3, 5, 14.) And this paradox is also the burden of Habakkuk, that is, the persecution of God’s covenant people when the non-elect enjoy all kinds of grace and favor. That is, there were and are many cases throughout history that common grace toward the non-elect is still abundant while common grace seems to be withdrawn from the elect. And from the experience in our times, we see many non-elects who still live perfectly upright and receive and enjoy God’s common grace. So, it is easily noticed that Van Til’s common grace model of a “later” stage does not appear to square with Scripture and our everyday experience.

And Van Vliet shows that a more serious practical problem lies in the fact that according to Van Til’s paradigm and from figure 2, the non-elect’s state is permanent and will always worsen. He states that once one rejects God, he “allows men to follow the path of their self-chosen rejection of Him more rapidly than ever toward the final consummation.” However, according to this paradigm, one cannot expect the prodigal son in Van Til’s favorite parable to return to his Father, because, since he rejected his Father one time, his state is permanent and will only worsen. Therefore, this extreme

102 Jan Van Vliet, 89.
supralapsarian view which focuses on the predetermined status of elects and non-elects can’t be said to appropriately represent the biblical view of the unbeliever’s status. And what is worse, Van Vliet claims, “this view might reinforce a careless attitude toward the unbelievers”\(^{104}\); that is, by judging people in their present appearance as being in a permanent state, we will weaken our zeal toward seeking the lost and loose our patience for their returning to the Father.

Fourthly, if we reconsider Van Til's as-if method, I think it will necessarily raise some practical and ethical questions. According to Dooyeweerd’s and Kuyper's assumption, we may assume that \(1+1=2\) is true both to believers and non-believers. But, Van Til's assumption is that since there is no common ground between believers and non-believers, the equation above is true to the believers and untrue to the non-believers in the sense that, according to van Vliet,

the non-believing mathematician believes he is dealing with brute fact while the believing mathematician knows that the facts are already constructively interpreted by the ontological Trinity and are only being re-interpreted re-constructively through his mathematical investigation. The non-believer, in reaching the conclusion that one plus one equals two has rejected God in the meantime, if un-self-consciously. The believer has reached the same mathematical conclusion, epistemologically un-self-consciously presupposing an altogether different (and to the non-believer, antagonistic) world- and life-view.\(^{105}\)

If this interpretation correctly reflects Van Til's view, a very practical question arises and it seems to end in absurdity. Do different presuppositions make any factual difference? If a medicine is administered by a non-believer with an atheistic world- and life-view, does the medicine not work, while a medicine administered by a believer with

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 101.
\(^{104}\) Ibid., 102.
a theistic world-view works? Or should we take the medicine "as if" it will work, while we know it will not work in fact because it is based on an untrue world- and life-view? Surely, if one follows Van Til's assumption radically, the Christians should know that the medicine will not work, but still take it as-if it will work. This is very hard to make sensible to common people.

In addition, this method seems to make Christians very unethical when engaging in dialogue with unbelievers, according to John Frame, since whenever Christians speak to the unbelievers, they have 'a hidden agenda' and a hidden assumption that the unbeliever's interpretations are always false. So the Christian can never be honest when in dialogue with unbelievers. Thus, this method, after all, recommends the Christian to be dishonest and unethical.

Judging from these reflections, that is, from Van Til's ambiguous definition of common grace, the weakened operation of common grace, the unclear beneficiaries of common grace, and even the reinforcement of unhealthy gospel witnessing and an unethical attitude towards unbelievers, it is likely that the whole structure of Van Til's common grace doctrine can hardly be tenable. Or, at least, we can say that his view is different from the traditional or Reformed Common Grace doctrine.

And, finally, I think this theological, doctrinal position of Van Til is, in turn, governed by his more fundamental philosophical presupposition of the "absolute antithesis." So, now, let us finally examine whether his extreme antithesis doctrine can be sustained.

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105 Ibid., 79.
Because, earlier, we have already dealt with the antithesis doctrine in relation to the common ground issue, now I will deal with all dimensions of the absolute antithesis doctrine and I will show how the overall antithesis doctrine of Van Til is hard to be sustained.

As a matter of fact, first of all, differently from our general expectation, I find that even among the Van Tilians, the question, 'is this extreme antithesis doctrine which is often identified as Van Til's typical position viable?' is continuously debated without reaching a consensus. And, in fact, Van Til himself was not able to provide the proper answers to the problems his doctrine necessarily raised.

And what is important to us now is that if the overall radical antithesis doctrine can not be successfully established, his new “temporal” paradigm of the Common Grace doctrine as well as his antithesis doctrine on the common ground issue will in turn be revealed to have no ground.

2) Critical Reflection on Van Til’s Absolute Antithesis Doctrine

Van Til is generally best known for his extreme antithesis doctrine. However, if we look a little more closely into his writings, we will soon discover that his position is not so clear as generally and commonly identified. It is true that he often mentions in connection with his extreme antithesis position that unbelievers know no truth whatsoever. Consider the following statements.

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107 Frame, John, 100-102.
108 Ibid., 81-87. I will elaborate this point later on.
109 CF. Ibid., 98-102.
But without the light of Christianity it is as little possible for man to have the correct view about himself and the world as it is to have the true view about God. On account of the fact of sin man is blind with respect to the truth wherever the truth appears. And truth is one. Man cannot truly know himself unless he truly knows God.\footnote{Cornelius Van Til, \textit{The Defense of the Faith} (3d ed.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 67.}

When the unbeliever \textit{interprets} the world, he interprets it in terms of his assumption of human autonomy ...... The unbeliever is the man with yellow glasses on his face. He sees himself and his world through these glasses. He cannot remove them. His \textit{interpretation} of himself and of every fact in the universe relating to himself is, unavoidably, a \textit{false} interpretation.\footnote{Van Til, \textit{A Christian Theory of Knowledge}, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969), 258-9.}

According to this description of the extreme antithesis, since all the unbeliever's efforts to know are affected by sin, the unbeliever knows no truth at all. That is to say, for example, the unbelievers know trees and flowers differently as believers do and their knowledge of them is inevitably wrong. That is also to say that all scientific developments by non-Christians are false and that believers have nothing to learn from non-Christians' culture, knowledge and discovery.\footnote{We will see later how Van Til responds to this problem.}

Like these statements, in some writings, he seems to really insist on the absolute antithesis doctrine as generally identified. However, if this view truly reflects Van Til's entire view of the unbelievers and their works, I think, the problem becomes too obvious. Above all, can this view truly reflect Van Til's own daily experience, living with the unbelievers and using their products and scientific developments? According to Prof. Frame's research, Frame does not believe that Van Til could mean the absolute antithesis doctrine in its fullest sense. He believes that the absolute antithesis doctrine can hardly be the true description of Van Til's own experience; if Van Til really holds to this absolute
view of antithesis, then, Van Til himself should not have studied Plato, Aristotle and other secular philosophers, simply because their knowledge is false.

Thus, according to Frame, the fact is that Van Til also well recognized this kind of problem and he actually takes pain to modify his extreme view, although his modified view still retains problems.

Firstly, let us see Van Til's remarks in which he explains the antithesis in terms of an opposition between two "principles," "systems," or "allegiances" rather than in terms of total details.\(^{113}\) Thus, Frame categorizes this description of the antithesis as "normative" antithesis formulation. In this formulation, Van Til adds a condition for the absolute antithesis. For example, he says, "insofar as men are aware of their basic allegiances, they are wholly for or wholly against God at every point of interest to man"\(^ {114}\) and "[b]ut to the extent that [the unbeliever] interprets nature according to his adopted principles, he does not speak the truth on any subject."\(^ {115}\) In other words, this is to say that in case the unbelievers are not fully aware of and faithful to their adopted principle, the unbelievers can discover truth.

And he also adds that this (not being aware of his principle) happens all the time: "[the unbeliever] can not take the principle of autonomy in its full seriousness of opposition to the truth."\(^ {116}\) And also, in his book, \textit{Introduction to Systematic Theology}, Van Til once replied to the objection that Van Til is denying that the unbeliever can discover truth. He said that "we mean nothing so absurd as that. The implication of the

\(^{114}\) Ibid., 29.
\(^{115}\) Ibid., 113.
\(^{116}\) Van Til, \textit{The Defense of the Faith}, 170.
method here advocated is simply that non-Christians are never able and therefore never do employ their own methods consistently.”\textsuperscript{117}

That is to say that Van Til is claiming that the unbelievers can have true knowledge to a certain degree at any time, because the non-Christians can never follow their principle consistently. As a result, Van Til’s ‘normative’ formulation amounts to being hardly compatible with his original extreme view of the antithesis.

And, consequently, this formulation also shows how Van Til understands the unbelievers’ contribution to scientific truth which is so obvious to Van Til himself and to us all. According to Van Til, these unbelievers’ discoveries of scientific truth are due to their inconsistent allegiance to their principle. He says,

\begin{quote}
I heartily agree with [the fact that unbelievers also have discovered many actual states of affairs, that is, scientific truths] but I must tell him that they have done so with borrowed capital. They have done so adventitiously.\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

and

\begin{quote}
If there is nobility in the search for truth in the work of the immanence philosophers, this nobility comes not from their own principle, but comes from the fact that the God of Christianity works by his Spirit in their hearts pleading with them to turn away from their immanence standpoint.\textsuperscript{119}
\end{quote}

These statements amount to saying that Van Til understands that when an unbelieving mathematician finds the truth of $1+1=2$, it is done “adventitiously” or by the work of Holy Spirit who made unbelievers un-self-conscious of their principle and made them stand on Christian principle for that moment. However, doesn't this sound even mystical?

\textsuperscript{117} Van Til, \textit{Introduction to Systematic Theology}, 103.
\textsuperscript{118} Van Til, \textit{Jerusalem and Athens}, 91.
In any case, Van Til is conceding by these descriptions that the unbelievers can find truth, though it is because the unbelievers cannot consistently hold to their allegiance to their principle or system.

According to Frame, there are other statements in which Van Til also acknowledges that unbelievers can have true “formal” knowledge. Criticizing C. S. Lewis’s Tao, an objective knowledge common to all men, Van Til replies, “[b]ut surely this general objectivity is common to Christians and non-Christians in a formal sense only.” That is, Christian and non-Christian can have “formal” common ground. And at another place, he also concedes that non-Christians even give “formal” assent to the “intellectual argument for the existence of God.” This means that unbelievers can have true knowledge, though it is “formal” and abstract knowledge. Consequently, I think these descriptions also can hardly be reconciled with Van Til’s extreme antithesis doctrine.

And further, contrary to his earlier opposition to the common knowledge of weighing and measuring, he now concedes its commonness in his book, The Defense of the Faith, though with qualification.

If sin is to be ethical alienation only, and salvation as ethical restoration only, then the question of weighing and measuring or that of logical reasoning is, of course equal on both sides. All men, whatever their ethical relation to God, can equally use the natural gifts of God .... As far as natural ability is concerned the lost can and do know the truth and could contribute to the structure of science except for the fact that for them it is too late.

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119 Ibid.
120 Frame, John, 89,90.
121 Van Til, Defense, 59.
122 Van Til, Theology, 198.
123 Van Til, Defense, 171.
In this passage, since he has always acknowledged that metaphysical common ground (such as our logical capacity) is preserved by common grace before and after the Fall, he actually claims that both believers and unbelievers can have a kind of true knowledge resulting from our common rational ability, including the ability of weighing and measuring. And this is also quite incompatible with his original antithetical statement.

Finally, I can point out another place where Van Til concedes the fact that unbelievers can have true knowledge even about the knowledge of God, confessing, at the same time, the difficulty of this problem. He says “we can not give any wholly satisfactory account of the situation as it actually obtains..... All that we can do with this question as with many other questions in theology, is to hem it in in order to keep out errors, and to say that truth lies within a certain territory,” and he concludes

The actual situation is therefore always a mixture of truth with error. Being “without God in the world” the natural man yet knows God, and, in spite of himself, to some extent recognizes God. By virtue of their creation in God's image, by virtue of the uneradicable sense of deity within them and by virtue of God's restraining general grace, those who hate God yet in a restricted sense know God, and do good.

Here, Van Til confesses that he has to admit that unbelievers should have the ability to know some part of the truth, and that unbelievers can do good, which is quite

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124 This fact is also illustrated by the example of the buzz saw on p. 74 in his Defense of the Faith. This illustration shows that the unbeliever's created faculties (such as the logical capacity) can work very efficiently while working in the wrong direction.

125 Van Til, Theology, 26.

126 Ibid., 27.
contrary to his earlier statement like this: “The natural man cannot will to do God's will. He cannot even know what the good is.”

As a result, considering Van Til’s overall writing on the antithesis, it is more likely that his extreme antithesis doctrine, as taken to be his typical position, does not completely represent his whole view of the antithesis doctrine.

With these observations, we need to listen to the voice of one of the representative Van Tilians, Prof. John Frame, on this issue. After his long research, he confirms our conclusion. He warns us not to take Van Til’s view on antithesis too simplistically. He says that “On the other hand, we can also understand why the extreme antithetical formulations are themselves inadequate without considerable qualification.” And he claims that contrary to the allegedly known extreme antithesis doctrine, Van Til's position on the antithesis doctrine is more complicated.

We have seen that Van Til's view of the unbeliever is actually very complex, a complexity which he appears to deny in his extreme antithetical formulations, but which we certainly must take into account if we are to build well on Van Til's foundation. Bearing this complexity in mind, how shall we practically prepare ourselves for apologetic encounters? What should we expect of the unbeliever?

and finally, he concludes

Putting together what we have learned, I would suggest that the extreme antithetical formulations with which Van Til's thought is most commonly identified and for which it is most commonly criticized do not represent Van Til at his best or at his most typical. Nor do they represent the full complexity of Van Til's thinking on these subjects. Indeed, it would, I believe, be very wrong for us to go into apologetic encounters taking these statements literally.

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127 Van Til, Defense, 54.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid., 100.
With this confirmation by one of the leading Van Tilians, we can now safely claim that Van Til's absolute antithetical doctrine cannot represent Van Til’s overall view of the antithesis doctrine.

And its implication, which is important for our research, is that we can also say that in addition to its many problems which we have already examined, his temporal paradigm of the Common Grace doctrine is shown to stand on a very unstable foundation. And secondly, this conclusion also implies that Van Til has, now, to admit the existence of common ground, contrary to his original denial of the existence of common ground, because his absolute antithesis doctrine can’t be sustained and the unbelievers can have true knowledge, too, though it can only be “formal” or “abstract” knowledge.

Now, because we have seen that Van Tils absolute antithesis doctrine can not stand and he has to accept the existence of common ground, then, what we need to study further is the questions, “where is this territory of common ground” and “what is the common ground which makes our communication possible between differing religious groups?”

E. Conclusion on the Problem of Common Ground between Van Til and Dooyeweerd

To find out the territory of common ground, I think we need to re-examine Kuyper’s, Dooyeweerd’s and Van Til’s claim for the common ground and to check how their claims for common ground are appropriate.
From our previous research, we remember that in Kuyper's case, Kuyper asserted that the common ground of our study lies in a lower territory of the study, that is, physical science, low spiritual science and logic. And in 'early' Dooyeweerd's case, Dooyeweerd claimed that the commonness consists in the same states of affairs and the same structure of thought, and we have also seen that he asserted this notion in a seemingly circular two-fold way. And in Van Til’s case, we remember that while his main contention is the denial of (epistemological, spiritual) common ground, he still considered as natural the existence of metaphysical common ground, when he mentioned that even after fall, the metaphysical commonness is still maintained.

Now, if we reconsider each position; firstly, as for Kuyper's position, it is generally accepted that in a postmodern context, once one agrees that every thought and perception is controlled by one's point of view or presupposition, he also accepts that physical sciences and low spiritual sciences cannot be an exception. That is, it is generally accepted that the basic scientific observations are already controlled by our prejudicial point of view or preunderstanding.131 And, each logical principle is also said to be universally valid only within its system. That is, though it seems permanent, we do not know what other system can come in the far future. A paradigm shift can happen over centuries. Thus, if one follows the lines of postmodern thought, I think it naturally follows that Kuyper's low territories cannot be common ground or universal truth to all human beings.132

131 For one of the examples of this idea, see Sandra Harding, *Is Science Multi-Cultural?*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998).
132 I learned this idea from James Olthuis's and Henk Hart's courses at ICS and I cannot further discuss this issue. It would go beyond the limit of this thesis.
Secondly, for Dooyeweerd’s case, if he meant by the states of affairs and the structure of theoretical thought only his discovered ‘modal structure’ and the ‘antithetical Gegenstand relation,’ I think it is very hard to avoid the criticism of contradiction, that is, his structure is also derived from his own religious conviction and, consequently, it cannot be universal common ground.

But, in fact, as we have seen, he said more than that. Firstly, we have seen that Dooyeweerd always presupposes that his discovered ‘states of affairs’ and ‘structure of thought’ are “not unprejudiced.” Thus, we know that his intended claim cannot be that his discovered states of affairs and structure of theoretical thought are final foundations and universal common grounds. However, then, where is the common ground in Dooyeweerd’s thesis after he has long insisted that there should be common ground which makes our communication possible?

I think we can find the clue for the true common ground in Dooyeweerd’s thesis in his later writings. After being accused of having a contradiction in his cosmonomic philosophy in the sense that he claims a complete communication breakdown, while maintaining the possibility of communication and agreement, he redefines the common ground as the “ontological” (metaphysical) condition.

In his later article, differently from his early view, Dooyeweerd claims that real contact is possible between different philosophical schools in the following common grounds. Brummer summarizes these four areas of common grounds from Dooyeweerd’s article: “1) All philosophers have to render an account of the same reality; 2) All philosophers have therefore to appeal to the same states of affairs in order to verify their accounts; 3) All philosophers are bound to the rules of theoretical thought, and hence they
all have to appeal to the same rules to determine the validity of their arguments; 4) As far as Western philosophy is concerned all philosophers participate in the same historical tradition or community of thought.\textsuperscript{133}

In this summary, first of all, we need to note that Dooyeweerd no more holds that the structures of theoretical thought such as the ‘Gegenstand relation,’ ‘its theoretical synthesis by the self’ and ‘the existence of irreducible modal spheres’ are a universal and common ground. Rather, he states that the same reality, states of affairs and rules of theoretical thought are common grounds. And he also acknowledges the limitation of his philosophy of theoretical thought in the sense that it belongs to a particular historical and local situation, which is the Western philosophical tradition.

Now, further, we need to elaborate what can be the same reality and the same states of affairs and the same rules of theoretical thought in the ontological sense in Dooyeweerd’s later work.

First of all, I think we all use the same rules of logic in our theoretical thought, in the sense that we are all born with the same logical capacity. For example, Brummer illustrates\textsuperscript{134} that analytic propositions such as “all people are human beings” and “if Buddhism is the true religion, then all other religions are false,” are always acceptable to everyone regardless of their religious conviction, because to deny this proposition would involve a logical contradiction, and we all reject logical contradiction because this rule of logic is our transcendental condition or our metaphysical condition.

Some might object to this concept of the universal rule of logic, since this rule of contradiction is valid only within the system which accepts it as valid. I believe it is true, but my point is that though a certain rule of logic might change according to its system, the capacity of logical thinking in all human beings cannot change, because the capacity is our metaphysical or ontological condition given when human beings were created and still preserved by God's common grace even after the Fall.

Secondly, what can be the same reality or the same states of affairs? Brummer calls this case “pure description” not in the sense that any particular person or group’s description is the only true, that is, “pure” statement without prejudice, but in the sense that this description is on an abstract level and needs not to be verified by referring to the fact of experience. For example, we can say that “People who confess different faiths, all confess faith; people who describe different states of affairs, all describe; people who pray to different Gods, all pray; people who evaluate according to different standards, all evaluate; people who propose different hypotheses, all hypothesize; people who give different commands, all give commands; etc.” In this sense, we can claim that the states of affairs described on such an ontological (metaphysical) level are common to all of us.

I believe that this is true, because whatever kind of interpretation and perception we may have, the reality is the same to all in the sense that when people see a ‘computer,’ for example, their educational and cultural background affects their perception depending

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135 Ibid., 173.
136 Ibid.
upon their living in a primitive state or in a developed country, but the fact that they see
the same object is the same for all.

And this might apply to the case of evaluation. When we evaluate, it is true that
the standards of evaluation are determined by differing religious convictions, but what is
the same for this case is that the evaluation is made by evaluative statements and the
same states of affairs are evaluated. In other words, when we discuss any topic, we can
take any position according to our religious conviction, but the topic is the same for all
involved in the discussion.

In this sense, I think Dooyeweerd is right in asserting that common ground
consists in a common reality, states of affairs and common rules of logic. In this sense, I
think that Van Til expressed the same idea when he said that human beings have a
metaphysical common ground, by which he meant that our logical and moral capacity
still remains the same after the fall for both believers and unbelievers.

In conclusion, I believe that the common ground which makes our communication
possible is found in the fact that we all have the same reality and the same metaphysical
commonness, regardless of our religious conviction.
II. Kuhn on the Problem of Common Ground
(Incommensurability Thesis)

Introduction

So far, I have discussed the issue of communication breakdown and, at the same time, the existence of common ground. And I have discussed this issue mainly within Christianity, especially regarding the issues between Dooyeweerd and Van Til. So it might give the impression that the element of prejudicial a priori in our discussion only exists in religious discussions. But this is not the case, and Dooyeweerd's thesis does not show that this phenomenon is limited only to religious areas. Rather, he teaches that the prejudicial or religious elements always exist in every part of our human experience.

This line of thought is also advocated by a secular scientist, Thomas Kuhn, who claims that this phenomenon of communication breakdown and the prejudicial a priori always exists even in the most rigorous scientific research process. In fact, there has been a long discussion on this issue of "incommensurability."

In general, what I have found in looking at this issue is that there is again the same kind of argument going on here as in relation to the common ground issue. That is, arguments from the positivistic tradition claim that Kuhn's communication breakdown is presented as a "total" communication breakdown, just as Van Til would argue on this issue. So there is no room for common ground to make communication and agreement possible. Consequently, because such total breakdown is contrary to the fact of our common experience, neo-positivists conclude that this thesis is false and should be dismissed.
In contrast, the Kuhnians argue that this communication breakdown is "partial" and there is still room for common ground, just as the Dooyeweerdians would argue on this issue.

In my argument below, firstly, I will defend Kuhn's incommensurability thesis by showing that the neo-positivist concern and anxiety are derived from their superficial and false reading of Kuhn's work and that Kuhn's incommensurability does not claim an absolute communication breakdown, but still maintains common ground. Secondly, I will conclude that this common ground is, like our common ground issue between Van Til and Dooyeweerd, derived from the most fundamental common ground, that is, our metaphysical or ontological common ground and, I believe, this is the case even though Kuhn does not explicitly define what the common ground is.

A. Kuhn's Incommensurability Thesis

After Kuhn's provocative book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was published, the discussion on it has continued and much of the discussion has been critical of his view. (Neo-) positivists criticize his view as "irrational," "subjective," and "depriving science of objectivity." Among them, Israel Scheffler takes the consequences of Kuhn's work to be quite extreme: "Independent and public controls are no more, communication has failed, the common universe of things is a delusion, reality itself is made by the scientist rather than discovered by him. In place of a continuity of

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rational men following objective procedures in the pursuit of truth, we have a set of isolated monads, within each of which belief forms without systematic constraints.”

I believe this sort of criticism is derived fundamentally from his opponents’ false interpretation of Kuhn's incommensurability thesis. Thus, while the main purpose of this part of my thesis is to defend Kuhn's position, my argument mainly deals with showing that the critics' understanding of Kuhn's incommensurability thesis is based on their superficial and mistaken reading of Kuhn's work.

1) General Criticism of Kuhn

Traditionally, practicing scientists, positivists, and lay persons have believed that science develops in a cumulative way. According to this view, later scientific theories emerge with more rational, comprehensive, and deeper accounts of the way the world is than their predecessors. Strikingly enough, however, Kuhn challenges this common belief. He argues that the development of science, that is, the change from one paradigm to another, is discontinuous and non-cumulative, but rather, “revolutionary.” The ground of his claim lies in his belief that, between competing paradigms, there is “sufficient difference, disparity, and incongruity to block the possibility of a comparative evaluation.” In other words, the rival paradigms are not only incompatible but often actually “incommensurable” (Kuhn, p. 103), that is “incapable of being compared or measured against a neutral standard.”

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Then, how did he come to arrive at this conclusion seemingly contradictory to our common belief? In various places in his book, Kuhn argues by showing evidence for several aspects of incommensurability between rival paradigms. At one place, he shows how the definition of a scientific term, for example, ‘mass,’ is used differently between a Newtonian and an Einsteinian paradigm (p. 102); at another, he demonstrates how scientists in different paradigms perceive different data in the same situation (pp. 113ff, 150); and at still another, he shows how scientists’ concerns are different (pp. 103-110). With these observations, Kuhn asks whether or not we have real objective criteria to decide which theory reflects the reality more truly and faithfully, and he denies the existence of common neutral criteria. He goes on to say that “the criteria of the adequacy of a scientific explanation” are internal to its own paradigm (p.110), which implies that neutral, objective comparison between two competing paradigms is impossible.

With this conclusion, Kuhn further claims that paradigm debate, or “theory choice,” can’t avoid being circular because the answer to the question of which paradigm or theory is better or adequate to describe the reality does not result from logical and neutral scientific debate. Kuhn says that “the status of the circular debate is only that of persuasion. It cannot be made logically or even probabilistically compelling for those who refuse to step into the circle.” (p.34) And furthermore, he uses a religious metaphor for adopting a new paradigm: “the transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced.” (p. 151, my italic) and he adds, “A decision of that kind can only be made on faith” (p. 158, my italic).

Now, Kuhn having said the above, it seems to be natural to some that Kuhn's incommensurability thesis results in the “irrationality” of the paradigm debate, since
there is no logical and scientific reason to choose between paradigms, and some might also say that Kuhn's thesis makes all scientific knowledge relative because each theory has its own right and cannot be compared to another theory under neutral standards. So, many critics label Kuhn's theory as "subjective," "irrational," and a matter of "mob psychology."142

This is generally the way of the neo-positivist interpretation of Kuhn's thesis. On this basis, neo-positivists tried to reject Kuhn's incommensurability thesis, thereby defending the positivist ideal. For example, Scheffler, after citing Kuhn's words explaining the discontinuity of scientific language between Newtonian and Einsteinian paradigms, (p.102) argues that this thesis will eventually result in total communication breakdown.

Such conceptual displacement, if it is conceived as affecting observational as well as theoretical notions, means that the ostensible sharing of observational terms by theoretical opponents is really a delusion. There are perhaps common sounds but no common meanings. There can thus be no intelligible conversation between scientists of differing theoretical persuasions. ..... It seems to follow, further, that we cannot literally speak of alternative theories of the same domain, nor of comparing these theories to see which gives a better account of the empirical facts within this domain.143

And he goes on to argue that this consequence necessarily entails a definite contradiction to the fact that there have always been debates and conflicts between different, competing paradigms in the history of science. How was that possible if it is

141 Siegel, p. 54.
143 Scheffler, p. 16.
true that two paradigms do not share common concepts or language or meaning of
language? Scheffler again asks,

If competing paradigms are indeed based in different worlds, and address
themselves to different problems with the help of different standards, in what
sense can they be said to be in competition? How is it that there is any rivalry at
all between them? To declare them in competition is, after all, to place them
within some common framework, to view them within some shared perspective
supplying, in principle at least, comparative and evaluative considerations
applicable to both.\textsuperscript{144}

For Scheffler, competition between theories already implies that there are certain
common criteria. And he insists that there should be constant, common elements on
whatever level to put theories in competition. He concludes that “Here the main point to
be stressed is that laws may retain their referential identities throughout variations of
theoretical context.”\textsuperscript{145}

In addition to this claim of a certain constant element between paradigms, neo­
positivists agree to the claim that “though it may be true that standards or criteria of
puzzle-solving are internal to their own paradigm, it does not follow that second level
criteria are also internal.”\textsuperscript{146} That is, the criteria which can compare competing paradigms
neutrally exist on meta level, external to the paradigms.\textsuperscript{147} Kordig also agrees with
Scheffler's criticism, saying

Kuhn has failed to show that paradigm differences imply evaluative differences at
a second, or meta, level; he has not shown that the sharing of second-order criteria

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p. 82.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p. 62.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 82
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., p. 83, “To be sure, such objectivity presupposes a certain sharing of standard at the second-order
level.” Cf. Siegel, pp. 54-56, Harris, James F. Against Relativism : A Philosophical Defense of Method
by enthusiasts of rival paradigms is impossible. He has, therefore, not demonstrated that scientific transitions consist only in non-cumulative persuasions and conversions.\footnote{Kordig, Carl R., \textit{The justification of Scientific Change}, (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing company, 1971), p.106.}

Consequently, what Scheffler and neo-positivists agree on is that though they admit that there are evaluative differences on a surface level, there should be a neutral and common standard on an abstractive or ‘meta’ level.

Thus, in these criticisms from the neo-positivist camp, people always presuppose that according to Kuhn’s theory, there is neither continuity nor comparability at all between two rival paradigms and thus Kuhn’s thesis will lead to total communication breakdown which is contrary to our common experience.

In this context, my contention below is that the critics’ understanding of Kuhn's incommensurability thesis is mistaken due to their superficial reading. On the contrary, my understanding of Kuhn's incommensurability thesis is that Kuhn also claims that there is sufficient overlap of “language, data, and standards or criteria of explanatory adequacy” between rival paradigms. And, the area in which Kuhn insists on the existence of absolute incommensurability lies in how we weight the importance of problems or how we deal with “value application.”

2) Kuhn's Incommensurability Thesis

In Scheffler’s criticism above, his fundamental assumption was that on Kuhn’s view there is absolute communication breakdown between rival paradigms, so that there...
is nothing like genuine communication and neutral comparison, not to mention rational argument. Thus, he refutes Kuhn by the obvious fact that there has always been rational debate between rival paradigms throughout the history of science.

However, first of all, Kuhn denies this line of interpretation as misunderstanding. Summarizing his thesis, he argues that he has always insisted that "communication between proponents of different theories [shows an] inevitably partial," rather than total, break. More recently, he asserts that he does not mean that incommensurability precludes comparability:

Most readers of my text have supposed that when I spoke of theories as incommensurable, I mean that they could not be compared. But "incommensurability" is a term borrowed from mathematics, and there it has no such implication. The hypotenuse of an isosceles right triangle is incommensurable with its side, but the two can be compared to any required degree of precision. What is lacking is not comparability but a unit of length in terms of which both can be measured directly and exactly.

There are also passages in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions to support the idea that there is sufficient overlap between paradigms. Kuhn states that a new paradigm "must seem to resolve some outstanding and generally recognized problems [of the old paradigm] that can be met in no other way," and "second, the new paradigm must promise to preserve a relatively large part of the concrete problem-solving ability that has accrued to science through its predecessors" (Kuhn, p. 169). This implies that there is sufficient overlap of language, data and standards between rival paradigms. That is why

149 Kuhn, The Essential Tension, p. 321.

150 Ibid., 338. Italic mine.
the new paradigm in the above quotation can “resolve” the old paradigm’s “outstanding and generally recognized problems.” If it be true that Kuhn claims total communication breakdown of data, language and criteria between rival paradigm, how can he say that the new paradigm can recognize and solve the old paradigm’s problems?

More clearly, Kuhn describes his incommensurability thesis at several places with the analogy of translation. What do we commonly experience in translation? If one language is translated into another, we believe that a certain amount of information is truly communicated to the reader. But we cannot say that the total meaning of a literature in different language is transferred to the reader, because a certain concept cannot be entirely explained because of its different cultural and historical background. In this sense, Kuhn says that “I simply assert [through the analogy of translation] the existence of significant limits to what the proponents of different theories can communicate to one another.” Here, as we know from our common experience of translation, Kuhn clearly shows that he does not mean to deny the possibility of communication between the proponents of different theories, but he tries to show the existence of the significant limitation of communication, just as translation always leaves a certain gap between two languages.

From these obvious statements and analogy for the possibility of communication and comparability, we can say at least that Scheffler’s assumption does not do full justice to Kuhn’s thesis. In the same line of thought, Doppelt also asserts that “Scheffler’s criticism that the existence of conflict and rivalry between paradigms refutes Kuhn’s

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incommensurability does not stand," since we have seen that Kuhn also always claims that proponents of different paradigms can communicate and share, to a certain degree, data, language and standards and thus they can debate and dispute.

Then, in what sense does Kuhn say that communication between paradigms shows a partial break and has significant limits, which makes debate “inevitably circular”? In other words, in what area is there incommensurability or absolute communication breakdown?

I suggest that the passages below reveal an insight into what he truly meant by “incommensurability,” which is blurred by Scheffler's interpretation.

As a result, the reception of a new paradigm often necessitates a redefinition of the corresponding science. Some old problems may be relegated to another science, or declared entirely 'unscientific.' Others that were previously non-existent or trivial may, with a new paradigm, become the very archetypes of significant achievement. And as the problems change, so often, does the standard that distinguishes a real scientific solution from a mere metaphysical speculation, word game, or mathematical play. The normal-scientific tradition that emerges from a scientific revolution is not only incompatible but often actually incommensurable with that which had gone before. (Kuhn, p. 103.)

This passage tells us that the main reason that causes rival paradigms to be incompatible and incommensurable lies in a 'redefinition of science' and a 'change in problem' and thus a change in standards. Here, Kuhn does not mention that there occurs a certain breakdown in understanding the common language, data and standards between the rival paradigms. Instead, he claims that the reason for incommensurability is because

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153 The Essential Tension, p. 338
the perspective of the proponents of each paradigm changes in their view of science and of what is the most important problem to solve and so what method is the most adequate to explain the distinctive problem of concern.

Let's examine another passage.

when paradigms change, there are usually significant shifts in the criteria determining the legitimacy both of problems and of proposed solution .... That observation returns us to the point from which this section began .... To the extent .... that two scientific schools disagree about what is a problem and what a solution, they will inevitably talk through each other when debating the relative merits of their respective paradigms. In the partially circular arguments that regularly result, each paradigm will be shown to satisfy more or less the criteria it dictates for itself and to fall short of those dictated by its opponent ... since no paradigm ever solves all the problems it defines and since no two paradigms leave all the same problems unsolved, paradigm debates always involve the question: which problem is it more significant to have solved. (Kuhn, p.109,10.)

Here again, Kuhn explains that what makes argument circular between paradigms is the difference in the question of which problem is more important to solve and which solution is more adequate for the distinctive problem.

To clarify this point, let's see the example of Daltonian chemistry to which Kuhn often refers.

According to Kuhn (Kuhn, pp. 71, 72, 107, 133), before the eighteenth century, the phlogiston theory of combustion is the normally accepted one. When substance loses weight in combustion, it was explained as due to losing phlogiston. However, anomalies were often observed when some substances gain weight in combustion. Though most chemists in the paradigm recognized the phenomenon, “it was not important to them.” But “some of the exponents of the paradigm gradually came to regard this anomaly

\[135\] Ibid., p.125. In trying to reconstruct Kuhn's thesis, Doppelt claims that “On our view, incommensurable
seriously and took it as important and tried to accommodate it” in any way. At that time, Dalton, who was raised in a different paradigm, since he did not start his career as chemist but as meteorologist, approached the problem with a different paradigm and presented a new ‘quantitative’ chemistry theory (Kuhn, p. 133), which was first refuted, but gradually turned into a new paradigm.

At the end of this explanation, Kuhn emphasizes the fact that the new theory is neither necessarily a more rational nor a more comprehensive account of chemical phenomena than its predecessor, because a new theory always entails some loss of problem-solving power of the old paradigm. The new paradigm,

however, ultimately did away with chemical 'principles,' and thus ended by depriving [old] chemistry of some actual and much potential explanatory power. To compensate for this loss, a change in standards was required. During much of the nineteenth century failure to explain the qualities of compounds was no indictment of a chemical theory. (Kuhn, p.107.)

From this example, first of all, unlike Scheffler's contention, it should be noted that Kuhn already presupposes that old and new paradigms share common observational data (e. g. “weight-gain” or “gain in combustion”). Secondly, the two paradigms see differently which problem it is more important to solve. Thirdly, therefore, a new paradigm is not always a more comprehensive and better account than its predecessor, because it also loses the potential explanatory power of the old paradigm. And this third point implies that the question of which science (paradigm) is better cannot be solved by any neutral meta-level criteria. Rather, it depends upon the proponents’ “value weighting.” Likewise, Kuhn explains, a shift of paradigm occurs simply because a new paradigms can and do share *some* (his italic) observational data, problems, and language.”
paradigm's agenda of problems and concerns is shifted. In other words, it is because scientists' viewpoint of "weighting the importance of a problem" changes, rather than as a result from rational debate.

In sum, our observation so far is that Kuhn's thesis is that the area of incommensurability, or the significant break between paradigms consists in the difference of 'weighting the importance of a problem,' rather than in understanding the common language, data and general criteria. This thesis becomes even more clarified through his later works against false neo-positivistic accusations.

3) Kuhn's Later Response against Critics

So far, I have developed my argument mostly with respect to Kuhn's first book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in spite of its relative inarticulation compared to his later discussions, because I thought this was necessary to show that his first work is consistent with his later ones. Especially Harvey Siegel criticizes Kuhn because his later work is a weakened or moderated form of his original thesis.156 James Harris also comments that Kuhn's later position softens the claims of his original presentation of the incommensurability thesis.157

Kuhn tried to clarify his position in his later work158 because he recognized his thesis was largely distorted and misunderstood by his critics. After his first book, critics

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156 Siegel, p. 57.
157 Harris, p. 90.
claimed that Kuhn’s view makes theory choice “a matter for mob psychology,”\(^{159}\) and that Kuhn believes that “the decision of a scientific group to adopt a new paradigm can not be based on good reasons of any kind, factual or otherwise”\(^{160}\) and “instead theory must be chosen for reasons that are ultimately personal and subjective; some sort of mystical apperception is responsible for the decision actually reached.”\(^{161}\)

These criticisms are again based on their unjustified assumption at bottom that incommensurability implies a total breakdown of the understanding of “the common language, data and general criteria.” Thus, the critics think that in Kuhn’s thesis there is no room for shared criteria and rational debate and thus conclude that in Kuhn’s view, “theory choice is only dominated by arbitrary and whimsical personal subjectivity.”\(^{162}\)

Against these criticisms, Kuhn replies that “reports of this sort manifest total misunderstanding,”\(^{163}\) and he re-clarifies his point with the ideas of “value” and “good reason.” For example, the critics claim against Kuhn that there have been “traditional standards for evaluating the adequacy of a theory, such as accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness”\(^{164}\) and that these standards are neutral on a meta level. But, Kuhn claims that he also agrees that there are such standards, namely ‘external’ criteria for theory choice. However, though they can be good reasons, they cannot always work as “compelling rules for choosing a theory” instead of its rival.\(^{165}\) Because when people must choose a theory, Kuhn says, they regularly encounter two kinds of difficulties.

\(^{159}\) Lakatos, p. 178.
\(^{161}\) Kuhn, “Postscript”-1969.
\(^{162}\) Siegel, p. 73.
\(^{163}\) Kuhn, The Essential Tension, p. 321.
\(^{164}\) Ibid., p. 319.
Firstly, though it is true that scientists all have the same standards, when they apply the standards to concrete cases, their application comes to differ and cannot always reach agreement. For example, “when one theory is more accurate in this area but less accurate in another area, and the other theory is the opposite,” the decision of theory choice is eventually made by the scientist’s personal ‘value weighting’, that is, which standard is more valued by the scientist, rather than by neutral meta-level criteria. Secondly, “when more than two standards are related in a situation,” Kuhn says, “the standards themselves must conflict with each other.” In a certain case, “some theories are superior in these criteria but inferior in other criteria and others superior in other criteria but inferior in these.” In this case, theory-choice also requires personal value weighting, even though it is true that scientists on both sides do have standards.

Eventually, Kuhn’s claim is that, although there might be external criteria, and so there exist good reasons to debate, theory choice still depends upon an individual’s subjective decision of which criteria or which area (problems) are more important than others. Kuhn summarizes this point with the idea of “value” application.

Nothing about that relatively familiar thesis implies either that there are no good reasons for being persuaded or that those reasons are not ultimately decisive for the group. Nor does it even imply that the reasons for choice are different from those usually listed by philosophers of science; accuracy, simplicity, fruitfulness, and the like. What it should suggest, however, is that such reasons function as values and that they can thus be differently applied, individually and collectively, by men who concur in honoring them. If two men disagree, for example, about the relative fruitfulness of their theories, or if they agree about that but disagree about the relative importance of fruitfulness and, say, scope in reaching a choice, neither can be convicted of a mistake. Nor is either being unscientific. There is no

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165 Ibid., p. 322.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid., p. 322,3.
neutral algorithm for theory-choice, no systematic decision procedure which, properly applied, must lead each individual in the group to the same decision.\textsuperscript{169}

Consequently, we can see that in Kuhn’s claim, people can debate rationally with good reasons, but there still are chances of cross-purpose arguing, if value application is different.

However, though after this clarification, Siegel, still regarding Scheffler and Shapere's criticism as successful, argues that “given incommensurability, it is difficult to make any sense of the term ‘good reason’ as it applies to paradigm debate”\textsuperscript{170} and again “Kuhn seems to want it both ways; he wants to maintain incommensurability (and so irrationality), yet deny irrationality and allow for communication between proponents of competing paradigms (thus give up incommensurability). It is clear, I hope, that Kuhn cannot have it both ways.”\textsuperscript{171}

But I believe that the fundamental misunderstanding which underlies Siegel's criticism is the assumption that incommensurability implies absolute communication breakdown between different paradigms due to complete misunderstanding of the common data, language, and criteria. So ‘good reasons’ must appear to him an expression that is contradictory to Kuhn’s incommensurability thesis.

However, as we have seen, this position is quite a misunderstanding of Kuhn’s thesis. Kuhn’s incommensurability always expects science to weight value in choosing theory, which cannot escape from personal preference.

\textsuperscript{169} Postscript-1969, p.200.
\textsuperscript{170} Siegel, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, p. 59.
However, critics raise a further objection that though they admit that those good reasons are chosen eventually by subjective value application, if “we keep on calculating the personal value application algorithm, then we can reach the one objective value application algorithm” at which all rational members of the group must arrive. Against this objection, however, Kuhn responds that at a meta level or at whatever level, “the objective algorithm cannot help being completed with subjective, idiosyncratic value application algorithms in actual decision.” That is, there always remains at bottom subjective “value application” operating in theory choice. Thus, incommensurability remains even after finding out the algorithm.

4) Conclusion

So far, I have tried to defend Kuhn's position from his critics’ unjustified claims, based on my reading of Kuhn’s literature. Basically, my claim has been that Kuhn's incommensurability thesis does not necessarily entail ‘irrationality’ of theory choice but still makes ‘scientific debate’ possible between competing paradigms.

Furthermore, I would like to add that my experience of researching the conflict between Kuhn and his critics amounts to confirming Kuhn's incommensurability thesis in another way. What has become apparent to me is that Kuhn’s predicted cross-purpose arguing is happening between Kuhn and critics such as Scheffler, Shapere, Siegel and Harris, and a partial communication breakdown has occurred, in the sense that even after Kuhn's ideas have become quite clear, given his later works that clarify his position with

clear and easy examples and demonstrations (about external criteria and value application), his critics stubbornly insist on their unjustified interpretation. Neo-positivists seem to me to be preoccupied with or committed to the positivist's ideal and their repugnance of relativism, so they do not justly and sufficiently deal with Kuhn's incommensurability thesis as it is and rush to prove the existence of objective external criteria, which they want to defend at any cost.

This is, I would say, precisely a case of a different 'value application' between them, which causes circular debate and which, after all, demonstrates Kuhn's incommensurability thesis. They all have, in Kuhn's term, 'good reasons' (that is why the scientific debate between Kuhn and his critics has been possible), but eventually they do not reach agreement because of their presupposed subjective 'value application.'

B. Evaluation of the Problem of Kuhn's Incommensurability Thesis

In Kuhn's work, we have seen another case of debating communication breakdown due to the lack of common ground in a certain area. And we have also seen that Kuhn continuously argues that this lack of common ground does not cause 'total' communication breakdown, because there is still sufficient overlap of common ground between different paradigms.

But, with accepting Kuhn's thesis, one could further ask, regarding our common ground issue, what makes this sufficient overlap of common ground possible. Kuhn said

173 Ibid., p. 329.
that differing paradigm groups have sufficient overlap of 'data, language, and criteria.' That is, they understand something common from certain data, language and criteria, though their paradigm or value application is different. This, of course, does not mean that our perception or evaluation of certain data, language, and criteria is the same for all, but that all people still understand something common from these data, language, and criteria. And our further question is: what could be the something common in the data, language, and criteria which makes our rational communication possible?

Most fundamentally, I believe the answer lies in the fact that all people, regardless of their paradigm or prejudice, meet the same reality and the same states of affairs and have the same rational capacity. So, people in different paradigms may have different understandings of, for example, a certain scientific phenomenon, but they still discuss the same phenomenon; and people may differ in understanding, for example, a certain religious experience, but they still discuss the same experience; and people may differ in their logical system, but they still have the same rational capacity.

In this sense, I think Kuhn's sufficient overlap of common ground, if traced all the way down, can be rendered, in Dooyeweerd's term, as the same reality, the same states of affairs, and the same rule of logic.

C. Conclusion on the Common Ground Problem

Through our overall research, we have seen that one of the common phenomena in the discussion of communication breakdown is the lack of common ground. In the
debate between Van Til and Dooyeweerd, it was because of differing religious convictions. In Kuhn, it was because of differing value application.

From this, one thing apparent is that there are always religious or prejudicial (valuational) elements in our theoretical thought and this causes our communication to be broken down and to be circular. And in another respect regarding our rationality, if we further discuss this prejudicial element issue, some may surely arrive at the fact that our rationality, which is always viewed as neutral and objective, is also always biased by its religious commitment or its situatedness in a paradigm or its being influenced by personal prejudices. This conclusion is precisely Dooyeweerd’s whole project, namely, to uncover “the pretended autonomy of human reason.”

At the same time with this discovery, we have seen that even though these figures, Van Til, Dooyeweerd and Kuhn, point to the existence of communication breakdown connected to a religious a priori, they do not and cannot claim that there is total communication breakdown, because there is always sufficient common ground which, in Dooyeweerd, is derived from our ontological (metaphysical) status given by God’s common grace and which, in Kuhn, is implied in his contention of the sufficient overlapping of data, language, and criteria, which, I claim, in turn, refers to our metaphysical commonness.
III. The implication for Reformed Apologetics

In “Apologetics” Benjamin Warfield traced the first use of the term ‘apologetics’ to Plank (1794) and Schleiermacher (1811). Ever since, however, there has been a long controversy about the task of apologetics among Protestant - even Reformed - theologians. At its bottom, the dispute stems from the problem of the validity of theistic proofs. That is, when one proves the existence of God by reasoning, e.g. God as the First Cause, is this proof valid for the Christian God revealed in the Bible and thus we can know God by reasoning, or is this proof mere speculation on a conceptual level and the Christian God is more than reason can capture in a concept?

Thus, if theistic proofs are valid for the Christian God, the task of apologetics is to provide unbelievers with rational reasons to compel them to accept the Christian faith. However, if these proofs are regarded as mere conceptual speculation, its task is restricted to the role to invite unbelievers to think of faith and to provide mere tools for the Holy Spirit to work in unbelievers.

In the Reformed tradition, there have been two major lines of thought on this problem: the Princeton theologians and the Amsterdam school led by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.

Bavinck, for example, adamantly denies the validity of theistic proof by reason alone:

Scripture does not reason in the abstract. It does not make God the conclusion of a syllogism, leaving it to us whether we think the argument holds or not. But it

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speaks with authority. Both theologically and religiously it proceeds from God as the starting point.  

We receive the impression that belief in the existence of God is based entirely upon these proofs. But indeed that would be a wretched faith, which, before it invokes God, must first prove his existence. The contrary, however, is the truth. Of the existence of self, of the world round about us, of logical and moral laws, etc., we are so deeply convinced because of the indelible impressions which all these things make upon our consciousness that we need no arguments or demonstration. Spontaneously, altogether involuntarily: without any constraint or coercion, we accept that existence. Now the same is true in regard to the existence of God. The so-called proofs are by no means the final grounds of our most certain conviction that God exists: This certainty is established only by faith; i. e., by the spontaneous testimony which forces itself upon us from every side.

By contrast, Benjamin Warfield, the representative of the old Princeton theologians, strongly defends the validity of natural theology.

The conviction of the existence of God bears the marks of an intuitive truth in so far as it is the universal and unavoidable belief of men, and is given in the very same act with the ideas of self. This immediate preception of God is confirmed and the contents of the ideas developed by a series of arguments known as the “theistic proofs.” The cogency of these proofs is currently recognized in the Scriptures. From the theistic proofs, however, we learn not only that a God exists, but also necessarily, on the principle of a sufficient cause, very much of the nature of the God which they prove to exist. Thus we come to know God as a personal Spirit, infinite, eternal, and illimitable alike in His being and in the intelligence, sensibility, and will which belong to Him as personal spirit.

According to this passage, it is clear that Warfield affirms that all people are able to know the existence of God and even some attributes of God by theistic proofs. Consequently, he pushes this line of thought on the task of apologetics. Because Christianity is rationally defensible, he says, “the task of the Christian is surely to urge his stronger and purer thought continuously, and in all its details, upon the attention of

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176 Ibid., p. 78.
men,"\textsuperscript{178} and the function of apologetics is "to investigate, explicate and establish grounds \[on\] which a theology .. is possible; and on the basis of which every science which has God for its object must rest."\textsuperscript{179}

As regards these two traditions, the conclusion that we can draw about the task of apologetics from our overall research is that, first of all, contrary to Van Til’s position of the absolute antithesis between the believer and unbeliever, the Christian can talk and discuss with the non-Christian in abstractive or purely rational ways with the same rules of logic in a genuine way. Secondly, however, the Christian also has to acknowledge that there will be a far reaching communication breakdown with the non-Christian in the spiritual (or evaluative) area and thus the Christian can never persuade people into conversion by purely rational discussion.

Thus, the task of apologetics can not be to provide the compelling reason to accept Christianity, as claimed by Benjamin Warfield. Rather, its task should be restricted to the role to invite the non-Christian to think of Christian faith and to provide mere tools for the Holy Spirit to work in non-Christians and to defend our faith from rational attack by unbelievers.

\textsuperscript{178} B. B Warfield, "Introductory Note," in Francis R. Beattie's \textit{Apologetics}, Vol. I (Richmond: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication 1903), p. 29.
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